

# Decolonizing Autoethnography in Kinesiology: Towards Decolonial Water Education

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Schools all over Turtle Island<sup>1</sup> teach a “settler colonial perspective”—one which has been based on systematically destroying human relationships to the land and water to make room for on-going colonial projects.<sup>2</sup> Settler colonial ideologies have actively worked to redefine the meanings and significance of the land and water.<sup>3</sup> These ideologies have become so entrenched in all levels of the education system that they appear as natural. Children and youth are taught from an

early age that the land and water are property which can be owned and used for productivity.<sup>4</sup>

Settler colonialism is different than other forms of colonialism because settlers arrive with the intentions of creating a new home on the land and then insist settler sovereignty over everything and everyone in “their” new domain.<sup>5</sup> Settler colonialism both shapes and is shaped by relations of “coloniality, racism, gender, class, sexuality and desire, capitalism and ableism,”<sup>6</sup> whereby the central concern is domination over land and water. As settlers make Indigenous land and waters their new home, property, and source of capital, they also disrupt the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the land and waters, resulting in profound violence.<sup>7</sup>

Settlers enshrine their law. They erase Indigenous laws, cultures, and histories through the enforcement of a settler colonial system.<sup>8</sup> To justify settler colonialism, settlers emphasize the differences between the “civilized” and the “savage”—creating the socioculturally and spatially distinct “Other” who is (un)imagined away from the settler state.<sup>9</sup> Differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada are (un)imaginatively, materially, and symbolically imbued with federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal natural resource policies, which are constructed to benefit the settler state.<sup>10</sup> The formation of “Other” and

<sup>1</sup> Or, what is called North America, for those operating outside of Anishinabe Creation stories.

<sup>2</sup> Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*, ed. Sandy Grande, 10th Anniv (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Dolores Calderon, “Speaking Back to Manifest Destinies: A Land Education-Based Approach to Critical Curriculum Inquiry,” *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2014): 24–36.

<sup>4</sup> Grande.

<sup>5</sup> Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–32.

<sup>6</sup> Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations.”

<sup>8</sup> Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel.

<sup>9</sup> Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 6–23.

<sup>10</sup> Joel Wainwright, “The Geographies of Political Ecology: After Edward Said,” *Environment and Planning A* 37, no. 6 (2005): 1033–43; Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations.”

“Otherness” arises through the creation of “here” and “there” spaces: distinct, particular, singular, and (un)imagined spaces that unite and separate socio-cultural groups, such as reservations.<sup>11</sup>

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Educational spaces are complicit in their reproduction of settler colonial ideologies through the reinforcement of settler meanings of land, while explicitly and implicitly erasing Indigenous histories and undermining Indigenous self-determination.<sup>12</sup> Despite those teachers, professors, scholars, staff, and schoolboards who work to unsettle settler colonialism in all levels of the education system, North American schools remain embedded in a settler colonial perspective and system.<sup>13</sup> Settler identities are constructed, built, and nourished in these academic settings.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it is critical to disturb and deconstruct settler colonial perspectives in Western education institutions at large.

In this paper, we address the ways settler colonial power systems shape the field of kinesiology and how the field neglects its connectedness to, and relevance of, water. Through a decolonizing autoethnography, the following questions are explored: How can White settlers and Western researchers

decolonize their own methodologies, theories, and practices? How does kinesiology, as a field, neglect the relationship between water and the study/practice of human movement? How can decolonial water education be introduced in kinesiology faculties and other physical cultural spaces to open awareness of spiritual relationships with land and water?

The paper concludes with future recommendations for decolonizing (water) education.

### Decolonizing Autoethnography

This paper is presented as a *decolonizing autoethnography*, a critical self-reflection of Stephanie Woodworth’s positionality as a White settler woman from Dryden, Ontario and graduate student in a kinesiology faculty at a large Canadian university.

The paper is assisted by Caroline Fusco, an Irish woman who immigrated to Canada in 1990. Prior to coming to Canada, she did not know the full histories of Indigenous peoples in North America and now acknowledges that she is a guest on this land and is privileged to live, work, and play on the traditional territories of First Nations peoples. She was Woodworth’s faculty supervisor during her master’s degree and guided Woodworth in early conceptions of the study, assisted Woodworth in her interpretations and writing for the defence of the thesis, and participated in critical revisions for this paper’s publication draft, and in the final submission of the document.

<sup>11</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2011); Gupta and Ferguson.

<sup>12</sup> John Tippeconnic III, “Critical Theory, Red Pedagogy, and Indigenous Knowledge: The Missing Links to Improving Education,” in *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*, ed. Sandy Grande, 10th Anniv (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 35–42.

<sup>13</sup> Eve Tuck, Marcia McKenzie, and Kate McCoy, “Land Education: Indigenous, Post-Colonial, and Decolonizing Perspectives on Place and Environmental Education Research,” *Environmental Education Research* 20, no. 1 (2014): 1–23.

<sup>14</sup> Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel. “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations.”

In this paper, we (Woodworth and Fusco) unpack Woodworth's positionality as a White settler woman doing research with Indigenous peoples alongside her experiences as a graduate

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from in order to proceed in a study that was not framed by Eurocentric knowledges. Beginning to understand the possible answers to the questions being proposed required more critical reflection on our researcher

student in kinesiology. In doing so, we draw from decolonizing, critical and indigenous studies, post-colonial feminism, and settler colonial studies to critically examine the ways in which kinesiology, as a field, neglects the relationship between water and the study and practice of human movement and, in doing so, we argue that such neglect reproduces settler colonial ideologies that is harmful to Indigenous communities and relationships with the land, water, and animals. This integrated theoretical framework seeks to privilege, honor, and celebrate Indigenous peoples, voices, knowledges, cultures, ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies, as well as unsettle the dominant and canonized approaches to education in kinesiology and Canada more broadly.

As we developed more and more understanding of Indigenous methodologies, it was clear to us that many of the methods we were drawing on in our work and approach to the study employed colonial methods, all the while attempting to be grounded in Indigenous worldviews. We became cognizant that more attention needed to be paid to who we were, how we were learning, and who we were learning

positionalities in relationship to the settler state and ostensibly a white-settler academic institution. To break out of the colonial system that continues to oppress and dismiss Indigenous Knowledges and unlearn the colonized language of the academy, researchers must re-center stories.

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have used storytelling to share knowledge.<sup>15</sup> As a form of storytelling, "autoethnography" is the written self-reflection of a researcher on their subjective experiences and positionality in relation to larger social meanings and discourses.<sup>16</sup> Autoethnography encourages researchers to examine and reflect on the taken-for-granted and ignored details of lived realities and environments—of peoples and places.<sup>17</sup> Autoethnographic research should not make generalized, "one-size-fits-all," "blanket-approach" statements about human lives and sociocultural conditions, but rather, work to enhance understandings of how lived experiences of the everyday shapes knowledge systems. Through autoethnographic stories, researchers can theorize and explain the everyday strategies of colonialism that have been used to erase and devalue Indigenous peoples and

<sup>15</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Zed Books Ltd., 1999).

<sup>16</sup> David M Hayano, "Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects," *Human Organization* 38, no. 1 (1979): 99–104.

<sup>17</sup> Holly Thorpe, Karen Barbour, and Toni Bruce, "Wandering and Wondering": Theory and

Representation in Feminist Physical Cultural Studies," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 28, no. 1 (2011): 106–34; Mohan J Dutta, "Autoethnography as Decolonization, Decolonizing Autoethnography: Resisting to Build Our Homes," *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 18, no. 1 (2018): 94–96.

knowledge systems. As a method, storytelling illuminates the interconnections between the personal, political, and professional, allowing readers to critically reflect on and examine the entanglements between colonial, capital, and neoliberal power systems.<sup>18</sup>

There are different types of autoethnography, but we focus here on decolonizing autoethnography. Decolonizing autoethnography interrogates how coloniality is inscribed in the production of knowledge by moving through a critical self-reflection of one's positionality in the colonial system.<sup>19</sup> This method challenges White/Western/Eurocentric imperialism as the naturalized site of knowledge production, while also offering a critically reflexive tool for decolonizing the academy. Decolonial autoethnographic research exposes the ways colonial violence is deeply woven through academic institutions and illustrates how such violence is engrained in everyday experiences, inside and outside the academy.<sup>20</sup> As settler colonial ideologies create and comprise the practices of knowledge production in White, Western, and Eurocentric institutions,<sup>21</sup> decolonizing autoethnographic research unsettles such narratives, through story, from the place and position of the researcher.

In the following pages, Woodworth will share her personal reflections during her master's thesis (written in italics), which will be intertwined with the authors' analysis of kinesiology's approach to water in the hope of building and supporting future decolonial water education in the field.

*As a White settler woman, with German and English heritage, born and raised in a settler town (Dryden, Ontario) on the territory of Anishinabe people, I grew up ignorant, unaware, uneducated about, and naïve to, my colonial complicity. Throughout my graduate degree in Tkaronto, I have learned how I have, and continue to, benefit from the colonial system that dispossesses, oppresses, marginalizes, and dehumanizes Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island.*

*I am responsible for my silence and complicity.*

*I will no longer be silent.*<sup>22</sup>

## **Honoring the Mother Earth Water Walks**

We initially found out about the Mother Earth Water Walks after Woodworth was invited to participate in the 2016 *Waawaase'Aagaming Water Walk*.

We learned that Anishinabekwe Grandmother Josephine Mandamin walked in ceremony around *Anishinaabewi-gichigami*<sup>23</sup> in the spring of 2003 with a small group of Anishinabekwe Grandmothers. Their decision was inspired by Grand Chief Edward Benton Banai (Anishinabe, Three Fires Midewiwin Society), who shared a prophecy that if human negligence continues in the future, an ounce of water will cost as much as an ounce of gold.<sup>24</sup> Since the inaugural 2003 *Lake Superior Water*

<sup>18</sup> Mohan J Dutta, "Autoethnography as Decolonization, Decolonizing Autoethnography: Resisting to Build Our Homes," *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 18, no. 1 (2018): 94–96.

<sup>19</sup> Dutta.

<sup>20</sup> Dutta, "Autoethnography as Decolonization, Decolonizing Autoethnography: Resisting to Build Our Homes."

<sup>21</sup> Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought*.

<sup>22</sup> Stephanie Woodworth, "Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?," 2018, ix.

<sup>23</sup> (Lake Superior)

<sup>24</sup> Mother Earth Water Walk, "About Us - Mother Earth Water Walk," 2017, [http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?page\\_id=11](http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com/?page_id=11).

Walk, Grandmother Josephine nourished a Water Walking movement, called the Mother Earth Water Walks, for which she walked around the five Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River, and elsewhere, encouraging innumerable people to also walk for *nibi*.<sup>25</sup>

Inspired by Grandmother Josephine, many individuals and communities outside Turtle Island have committed themselves to water as Water Walkers, water carriers, and water protectors.<sup>26</sup> Following Grandmother

Josephine's footsteps, annual Water Walks are hosted in communities around the world to protect and heal waterbodies. *Waterbodies* refer to both our human bodies (consisting mostly of water), as well as the physical bodies of water that gift us life (oceans, lakes, rivers, creeks, streams, rain, snow, ice, clouds).

Walking for *nibi*, a symbol of physical culture and connection to nature, has never been explored in kinesiology.

*Every step teaches you to walk with intention and attention to every movement, breath, word, action, behavior, and attitude. Walking with intention and attention to nibi's gifts of life brings powerful energies of healing from the sky to the earth. The act of walking with love and gratitude for water teaches*

*humility and responsibility, and emanates powerful emotions and energies outwards.*<sup>27</sup>

The mission of the Mother Earth Water Walks is to build sacred relationships between peoples and *nibi* by walking around, with, and for, waterbodies. Water Walkers hope to wake up the

consciousness of current generations to ensure that future generations know the waters are (healthy) living entities.<sup>28</sup>

Mother Earth Water Walks are an Anishinabe ceremony

from start to finish, rooted in the importance of enacting *Anishinabekwe*<sup>29</sup> responsibilities to carry, care for, and speak for *nibi*.<sup>30</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer (Anishinabe, Citizen Potawatomi Nation)<sup>31</sup> describes that for Anishinabe people, "ceremony is a vehicle for belonging—to a family, to a people, and to the land." Ceremony offers a precious gift to Mother Earth in a moral covenant of reciprocity and builds reciprocity and responsibility, which brings attention to intention, and transcends the boundaries of the individual to resonate with the spiritual.<sup>32</sup>

The Mother Earth Water Walks are ceremonial journeys of healing and protection, through the development and nourishment of sacred connections and relationships between people and *nibi*.<sup>33</sup> Walking braids reciprocity,

**Since the inaugural 2003 Lake Superior Water Walk, Grandmother Josephine nourished a Water Walking movement.**

<sup>25</sup> (water)

<sup>26</sup> Debby Wilson Danard, "Be the Water," *Canadian Woman Studies* 30, no. 2–3 (2013): 115–20.

<sup>27</sup> Woodworth, "Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?," 73.

<sup>28</sup> Deborah McGregor, "Indigenous Women, Water Justice and Zaagidowin (Love)," *Canadian Woman Studies* 30, no. 2–3 (2013): 71–78.

<sup>29</sup> (Ojibwe woman)

<sup>30</sup> Deborah McGregor, "Honouring Our Relations: An Anishnaabe Perspective," *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada* 27, no. 1 (2009): 27–41.

<sup>31</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 37.

<sup>32</sup> Kimmerer.

<sup>33</sup> Danard, "Be the Water"; Renée Elizabeth Mzinegiizhigo-kwe Bédard, "Keepers of the Water: Nishnaabe-Kwewag Speaking for the Water," in *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, ed. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2008), 89–110.

responsibility, and respect in a sacred bond of partnership between the walker's physical waterbody and the waterbodies they walk for—all joined in a powerful symbiosis. Every step is a prayer for *nibi*, land, peoples, plants, animals, birds, fish—all of Creation.<sup>34</sup>

*My mind, body, and spirit opened to water on the Waawaase'Aagaming Water Walk. Something changed significantly within me that day. Since then, every step moving forward has been in healing, love, gratitude, and hope.*<sup>35</sup>

Committed to Grandmother Josephine Mandamin and the Water Walkers, Woodworth worked to gather, harvest, and map stories about the Water Walks, according to the First Nations OCAP principles of “ownership, control, access, and possession”<sup>36</sup> and in mutual connection with Grandmother Josephine and Joanne Robertson (coordinator of the Mother Earth Water Walks).

With a public archive and digital story map, we work to share how the Mother Earth Water Walks are fundamental in (re)building sacred relationships between peoples and *nibi*. To bring these stories of the importance of walking and protecting water to kinesiology and to assist the archiving and mapping of the Mother Earth Water Walks required critical reflection on our subjectivities and positionalities, which, in turn, required addressing, rethinking, and changing research methods and methodologies multiple times.

*I increasingly saw a transformation in myself and the type of research I was doing. I realized I had something significant to share about what I did, how*

*I did it, and why that realization is important for the field of kinesiology and my subdiscipline of physical cultural studies (PCS).*<sup>37</sup>

Inspired by the Water Walkers approach to the water and to the earth, and with approval of her supervisory committee, Woodworth was provoked to conduct a decolonizing autoethnography for her master's research in order to bring attention to the absence of water in kinesiology, while simultaneously and uncompromisingly contributing to a public archive and digital story map of the Mother Earth Water Walks.

With further guidance from her principal supervisor (Fusco), Woodworth focused on a critique of her research process through a decolonizing autoethnography rather than analyze and share the stories gathered about the Water Walkers for her final thesis. By examining more closely her position as a White settler Canadian woman, Woodworth drew connections between the ways in which water is neglected in kinesiology and the settler colonial power systems that govern and pollute waterbodies in the country.

*I purposely do not examine the Water Walkers' stories through a typical Western scientific method of discourse or content analysis, to specifically ensure their narratives will not be owned by the University of Toronto.*<sup>38</sup>

The next step was to examine the displacement of the land and water in the discipline of kinesiology and in physical cultural spaces in Canada more broadly.

<sup>34</sup> Mother Earth Water Walk, “About Us - Mother Earth Water Walk.”

<sup>35</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?”, 44.

<sup>36</sup> Canada National Aboriginal Health Organization, “Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research: A Critical

Analysis of Contemporary First Nations Research and Some Options for First Nations Communities,” *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, no. January (2005): 80–95.

<sup>37</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?”, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?”, 4.

## The Inconvenient Truth of Kinesiology

Kinesiology is the study of the human body in relation to movement and has recently become a highly popularized undergraduate program in both Canada and the United States of America.

The field emerged from a collection of Western biophysical sciences (anatomy, physiology, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics) to understand the active human body,<sup>39</sup> and has since branched off into three “streams” or subdisciplines: biological, psychological, and sociological. Each stream has distinct approaches to exploring the various representations, meanings, and experiences of the human body.

Within each subdiscipline of kinesiology, there are further areas of specialization. For example, the sociological subdiscipline branches off into: Sociology of Sport (SS), Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), and, finally, Physical Cultural Studies (PCS), an area in which both Woodworth and Fusco teach and research. While the field of kinesiology is multi-disciplinary, the isolated subdisciplines and sub-areas do not constitute an integrated field of kinesiology. An interdisciplinary field requires connections among the subdisciplines, not simply a collection of cross-disciplinary areas that live together. Due to intensified specialization

and fragmentation, there is a fundamental lack of comprehensiveness within the field.<sup>40</sup>

*Students move through the kinesiology program, often unclear and confused as to how each subdiscipline connects with another. In third and fourth year of the undergraduate degree, students begin selecting which stream they want to specialize in, by choosing courses from the different subdisciplines. During this time in the degree, many students still do not understand what kinesiology is.<sup>41</sup>*

Despite purporting to encompass biological, psychological, and sociological understandings of the active human body, there is, undoubtedly, a scientific hegemony within the field that pushes kinesiology research further away from interdisciplinary and closer to a unidirectional and epistemological scientific approach.<sup>42</sup>

Many kinesiology programs across the USA, and in Canada specifically, privilege the biophysical sciences, without offering any PCS courses.<sup>43</sup> While Canadian universities are encouraged to maintain multi-disciplinary faculties for accreditation purposes, quantitative and biophysical sciences still dominate.<sup>44</sup> For example, the Canadian Council of University Physical Education and Kinesiology Administrators (CCUPEKA) accreditation requires six courses in biophysical and behavioral sciences, but only two in social sciences and/or humanities.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, across universities and institutions, the “inconvenient truth” of kinesiology is that there is an epistemological

<sup>39</sup> David L. Andrews, “Kinesiology's Inconvenient Truth and the Physical Cultural Studies Imperative,” *Quest* 60, no. 1 (2008): 46–63.

<sup>40</sup> David L. Andrews and Michael D Giardina, “Sport without Guarantees: Toward a Cultural Studies That Matters,” *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies* 8, no. 4 (2008): 395–422.

<sup>41</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?”

<sup>42</sup> Andrews, “Kinesiology's Inconvenient Truth and the Physical Cultural Studies Imperative.”

<sup>43</sup> Andrews.

<sup>44</sup> Delia D Douglas and Joannie M Halas, “The Wages of Whiteness: Confronting the Nature of Ivory Tower Racism and the Implications for Physical Education,” *Sport, Education and Society* 18, no. 4 (2013): 453–74.

<sup>45</sup> Canadian Council of University Physical Education and Kinesiology Administrators, “CCUPEKA Accreditation,” 2020, <http://www.ccupeka.org/accreditation/>.

hierarchy rooted in—and shaped by—neoliberal, capital-colonial power systems.

This hierarchy continues to reproduce scientific and Western hegemonies,<sup>46</sup> which include a lack of acknowledgement of how the land, water and nature shape our ways of being in the world.

## Whiteness in Physical Cultural Studies (PCS)

Physical Cultural Studies (PCS) is a synthesis of empirical, theoretical, and methodological influences on the critical analysis of active bodies, particularly how they become organized, represented, and experienced in relation to structures of power,<sup>47</sup> as well as how they can be complicit in reproducing colonial knowledge.

While PCS incorporates knowledge from a wide range of sources (i.e. gender studies, race and ethnic studies, queer studies), the subdiscipline does not necessarily facilitate an interdisciplinary understanding. PCS scholars have been criticized for poor knowledge translation, lack of widely accessible theory, and too few connections or dialogues with other disciplines for joint research efforts.<sup>48</sup> There is also a tendency within the subdiscipline to disconnect the material conditions of existence from the lived experiences of the cultural groups,

communities or populations examined.<sup>49</sup> Material conditions of existence are the physical and sociocultural environments in which people live, so, when separating the person or group from their environment, it is impossible to understand their lived experiences and realities.<sup>50</sup>

*I quickly learned that dominant, Western methodologies and theories constrain the field. Histories and geographies are often taken-for-granted, and Indigenous methodologies and knowledges are too frequently ignored or dismissed. As a field rooted in Western, colonized methodologies and theories, it is clear why PCS researchers have tended to separate the human condition from the lived realities of the peoples and groups they are studying.<sup>51</sup>*

Fortunately, there is a long legacy of critical race scholars<sup>52</sup> and postcolonial feminist researchers<sup>53</sup> in PCS who have demonstrated how discourses of Whiteness and neoliberalism are reinforced in everyday sport practices and recreation spaces<sup>54</sup>—evoking what Fusco has labeled “cultural landscapes of purification.”<sup>55</sup> In these practices and landscapes, *Whiteness* is pervasive.

Whiteness can be defined as the operation of White power and privilege through the denial and lack of comprehension of a reality that exists outside of the dominant White perspective.<sup>56</sup> Whiteness is an ideology, discourse, system, and structure that governs the field of kinesiology

<sup>46</sup> Andrews, “Kinesiology’s Inconvenient Truth and the Physical Cultural Studies Imperative.”

<sup>47</sup> Andrews.

<sup>48</sup> Andrews.

<sup>49</sup> Andrews and Giardina, “Sport without Guarantees: Toward a Cultural Studies That Matters.”

<sup>50</sup> Andrews and Giardina.

<sup>51</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where’s the Water in Kinesiology?”, 55.

<sup>52</sup> (e.g., Ben Carrington, Carl James, Harry Edwards, Janelle Joseph)

<sup>53</sup> (e.g., Mary MacDonald, Delia Douglas)

<sup>54</sup> Samantha King, “Homonormativity and the Politics of Race: Reading Sheryl Swoopes,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*

13, no. 3 (2009): 272–90; Delia D Douglas, “Venus, Serena, and the Inconspicuous Consumption of Blackness: A Commentary on Surveillance, Race Talk, and New Racism (S),” *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 2 (2012): 127–45; Ellen J Staurowsky, “Privilege at Play: On the Legal and Social Fictions That Sustain American Indian Sport Imagery,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 28, no. 1 (2004): 11–29.

<sup>55</sup> Caroline Fusco, “Cultural Landscapes of Purification: Sports Spaces and Discourses of Whiteness,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 22, no. 3 (2005): 282–309.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas and Halas, “The Wages of Whiteness: Confronting the Nature of Ivory Tower Racism and the Implications for Physical Education.”

and physical education.<sup>57</sup> The predominance of White people and (Eurocentric, Western scientific) cultures of Whiteness have shaped, and continue to shape, the field's research, pedagogies, practices, and knowledge production, the recruitment and retention of racialized minority and Indigenous students,<sup>58</sup> and the very architecture of kinesiology faculties.

**This hierarchy continues to reproduce scientific and Western hegemonies, which include a lack of acknowledgement of how the land, water and nature shape our ways of being in the world.**

For example, Fusco<sup>59</sup> showed how discourses of Whiteness and neoliberal discourses affect subjects who administer, use, and maintain everyday sport and recreation spaces, which (re)produce racial (spatial) superiority and cultural hegemony. This kind of work demonstrates how spaces of health and fitness (spaces that kinesiology faculties are often housed within) inscribe discourses of responsibility and self-governance to maintain (Western) neo-liberal imperatives of health.

These kinds of spaces produce “cultures of healthism” and “imperatives of hygenism” based on Western notions of purity.<sup>60</sup>

*I recognize how I am privileged in this system of Whiteness, however, I wanted to actively work to dismantle discourses of Whiteness, racism, and colonialism in my faculty, discipline, and in my own research. Importantly, I had to consider how the discourses of Whiteness, exercise as medicine, and its production of healthism worked to purify bodies, spaces, and social relations, as this is a classic example of settler colonial ideologies and narratives of (health) assimilation.<sup>61</sup>*

We wanted to consider these particular discourses because “exercise as medicine” and neoliberal tenets of self-responsibility and self-governance for health have been deemed problematic because they imagine a particular subject who has the means to take care of themselves and their family.<sup>62</sup> These discourses rarely account for those who are less privileged and who are racially, economically, physically, and marginalized.<sup>63</sup> They have therefore been critiqued as neocolonial.<sup>64</sup>

Although working to expose and dismantle the system, as White women researchers in a Western academic institution, we have actively

<sup>57</sup> Douglas and Halas.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas and Halas.

<sup>59</sup> Fusco, “Cultural Landscapes of Purification: Sports Spaces and Discourses of Whiteness.”

<sup>60</sup> Fusco, “Cultural Landscapes of Purification: Sports Spaces and Discourses of Whiteness.”

<sup>61</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?”, 58.

<sup>62</sup> Geneviève Rail, “The Birth of the Obesity Clinic: Confessions of the Flesh, Biopedagogies and Physical Culture,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 29, no. 2 (2012): 227–53; Oli Williams and Kass Gibson, “Exercise as a Poisoned Elixir: Inactivity, Inequality and Intervention,” *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 10, no. 4 (2018): 412–28; Lisette Burrows, “Close to Home: What Kind of Family Should We Become?,” in *Families, Young People, Physical Activity and Health* (Routledge, 2016), 57–68;

David Nicholls et al., “Keep Fit: Marginal Ideas in Contemporary Therapeutic Exercise,” *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 10, no. 4 (2018): 400–411.

<sup>63</sup> Caroline Fusco, “Governing Play: Moral Geographies, Healthification, and Neoliberal Urban Imaginaries,” *Sport and Neoliberalism: Politics, Consumption and Culture*, 2012, 143–59; Moss E Norman et al., “Examining the More-than-Built Environments of a Northern Manitoban Community: Re-Conceptualizing Rural Indigenous Mobilities,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 42 (2015): 166–78.

<sup>64</sup> Renee K L Wikaire and Joshua I Newman, “Neoliberalism as Neocolonialism?: Considerations on the Marketisation of Waka Ama in Aotearoa/New Zealand,” in *Native Games: Indigenous Peoples and Sports in the Post-Colonial World* (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2014).

benefitted and experienced privilege from the same system that oppresses, marginalizes, and excludes racialized and Indigenous peoples. And, so, we have responsibility to actively dismantle settler colonial perspectives and discourses of Whiteness and purification in the field of kinesiology, as well as in our research. As mentioned above, there are scholars who have, and, are doing, important decolonizing work in the field, however, many students are not exposed to these works in required or elective academic courses throughout their undergraduate and graduate degrees.

*Throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies, my education was limited mostly by dominant White men in the field. The theories and methods I was taught, and the articles and books I read, were from the perspectives of a White settler man. To find a base in the field for my research, I had to conduct significant reviews of literature in kinesiology and PCS outside of my classroom experiences.*<sup>65</sup>

This is not surprising given that there is a profound lack of racial diversity and a strong prevalence of Whiteness within Canadian faculties of kinesiology. Additionally, there is often a complete underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized faculty members and of curriculum content related to race, diversity, and Whiteness.<sup>66</sup>

Overall, the (re)production of Whiteness in kinesiology is reflected in its programs, hiring, and research. While some Canadian institutions

are slowly addressing their settler colonial legacies,<sup>67</sup> there are only a few undergraduate and graduate courses offered that cover critical race studies and Indigenous Knowledges, and few to no Indigenous faculty members in faculties of kinesiology in Canada.<sup>68</sup> Current and future faculty members of all subdisciplines in kinesiology must learn how to integrate Indigenous Knowledges and methodologies into their course curricula, so as to engage in a deconstruction of Whiteness and settler-colonialism in the field, and actively promote the hiring of Indigenous faculty.

*Given my interest in water, I hoped also that my research could also help bridge the gaps between the subdisciplines of kinesiology to understand water in a holistic way, and, thus, contribute to the comprehension and integration of the field.*<sup>69</sup>

Beyond the field of kinesiology, Whiteness is generally embedded in, and shapes experiences of, physical cultural spaces in Canada.<sup>70</sup> In this paper, we define physical cultural spaces as the spaces in which active bodies are organized, represented, and assigned meaning by systems and structures of power.

While there are physical cultural spaces that actively deconstruct and disrupt Whiteness in Canada and celebrate indigeneity and Indigenous sovereignty (i.e. Mother Earth Water Walks, Indigenous Pow Wows and Potlaches) and work to create new understandings of physical culture,<sup>71</sup> the dominant physical cultural spaces in

<sup>65</sup> Woodworth, "Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?", 58.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas and Halas, "The Wages of Whiteness: Confronting the Nature of Ivory Tower Racism and the Implications for Physical Education."

<sup>67</sup> University of Toronto, "KPE Task Force on Race and Indigeneity," 2018, <https://www.kpe.utoronto.ca/about/special-projects-initiatives/kpe-task-force-race-and-indigeneity>.

<sup>68</sup> Douglas and Halas.

<sup>69</sup> Woodworth, 66.

<sup>70</sup> Simon Darnell, Janelle Joseph, and Yuka Nakamura, *Race and Sport in Canada: Intersecting Inequalities* (Canadian Scholars' Press, 2012); Douglas and Halas, "The Wages of Whiteness: Confronting the Nature of Ivory Tower Racism and the Implications for Physical Education."

<sup>71</sup> Victoria Paraschak and Kristi Thompson, "Finding Strength (s): Insights on Aboriginal Physical Cultural Practices in Canada," *Sport in Society* 17, no. 8 (2014): 1046–60; Lucen Liu, "Paddling Through Bluespaces: Understanding Waka Ama as a Post-Sport Through

Canada mostly privilege White bodies and spaces and erase Indigenous values of the land and water.

Thus, it is critical that everyone working in physical cultural spaces (i.e., researchers, educators, coaches and trainers, managers, business owners, staff, athletes, participants and volunteers) understands the ways these spaces are shaped by Whiteness and neglect the importance of water.

## **The (Dis)Connection Between our Water(bodies)**

Coming to the realization about the lack of Indigenous faculty and knowledges in kinesiology, Woodworth became passionate about researching the relationship between water and physical cultural spaces.

*As an undergraduate and graduate student in kinesiology, I observed how water is continually taken for-granted in the field's teaching, research, and practices. Considering kinesiology is a multi-disciplinary (biological, psychological, sociological) field analyzing the human body in relation to movement, water should be a central and focal point of study.*<sup>72</sup>

As the human body is mostly comprised of water,<sup>73</sup> access to (reliable, safe, clean) water fundamentally shapes human lives and movement. Furthermore, Woodworth was

learning how identities, geographies, histories, societies, cultures, economics, and politics have been, and continue to be, built and constructed around water. Knowledge and perceptions of water and water-related issues, as well as access to reliable, safe, and clean water resources, will (in)directly shape values and interactions with water.<sup>74</sup> Considering this deep relationship between people and water, the question about how kinesiology, as a field, neglects the relationship between water and the study/practice of human movement is a pertinent one because it extends beyond the field's current knowledge framework and has implications for physical cultural spaces in Canada.

**The dominant physical cultural spaces in Canada mostly privilege White bodies and spaces and erase Indigenous values of the land and water.**

To illustrate, a study examined how the Hamilton Harbor in Ontario, Canada transformed following European settlement between 1858 and 1914.<sup>75</sup> The ways in which discourses of environmental conservation evolved over the decades showed how environmental changes and fishing practices threatened water quality, species of fish, ecosystems, and habitats in, and around, *Niigaani-*

Indigenous Māori Perspectives," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 2020, 0193723520928596.

<sup>72</sup> Woodworth, "Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?", 1.

<sup>73</sup> Ronald J Maughan et al., "Water Balance and Salt Losses in Competitive Football," *International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism* 17, no. 6 (2007): 583–94.

<sup>74</sup> Julia Baird et al., "Perceptions of Water Quality in First Nations Communities: Exploring the Role of Context," *Nature and Culture* 10, no. 2 (2015): 225–49,

<https://doi.org/10.3167/nc.2015.100205>; Lindsay P.

Galway, "Boiling over: A Descriptive Analysis of Drinking Water Advisories in First Nations Communities in Ontario, Canada," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 13, no. 5 (2016): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph13050505>.

<sup>75</sup> Nancy B Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, "Sportsmen and Pothunters": Environment, Conservation, and Class in the Fishery of Hamilton Harbour, 1858–1914," *Sport History Review* 28, no. 1 (1997): 1–18.

*Gichigami*.<sup>76</sup> Cruikshank and Bouchier<sup>77</sup> also investigated the shift from public swimming beaches to outdoor pools as a response to the dangers of water pollution in the Hamilton Harbor area. Physical and moral pollutions spread throughout the city, creating dirty spaces, unfit for swimming or other water-based recreational activities.<sup>78</sup> These dirty spaces resulted in the closure of Hamilton's public beaches, as the beaches were not immune to the spread of the physical and moral pollutions.<sup>79</sup>

Other than a small pool of literature, only few published studies in kinesiology examine how water shapes human lives. Though there are countless studies outside the field of kinesiology that focus on the importance of water to socio-cultural and physical health,<sup>80</sup> the lack of attention to water in physical cultural spaces in Canada is shocking, given that we, as humans, are dependent on water to live, and that these spaces and facilities depend and are reliant on water (e.g., swimming, showering, drinking water for sports, physical activity and recreation, washing sports equipment).

We believe that it is incumbent on everyone working in physical cultural spaces to understand the various properties and dimensions of water to teach about and research the active human body. Water and access to (reliable, safe, clean)

water fundamentally shapes how we move, where we move, and why we move.

## Water and Physical Cultural Spaces in Canada

Through a decolonizing autoethnography, Woodworth began to realize that the lack of attention to water in kinesiology reflected how water is taken-for-granted in Western societies, particularly physical cultural spaces in urban Canada.

While reliable, safe, and clean water is commonplace for most people living in Canada, First Nations communities continue to face ongoing Drinking Water Advisories (DWAs) and water insecurities.<sup>81</sup> Water insecurities can lead to a range of health, environmental, socio-economic, cultural, spiritual, and political issues,<sup>82</sup> and are a result of past and current settler colonial power systems that govern, regulate, and discriminate against Indigenous peoples.<sup>83</sup> Water insecurities in First Nations communities are a major public health concern,<sup>84</sup> as well as a complete paradox given how water has spiritual and cultural significance for many First Nations peoples. As the late Grandmother Josephine Mandamin (Anishinabe, Wikwemikong Unceded

<sup>76</sup> (Lake Ontario); Bouchier and Cruikshank.

<sup>77</sup> Ken Cruikshank and Nancy B Bouchier, "Dirty Spaces: Environment, the State, and Recreational Swimming in Hamilton Harbour, 1870–1946," *Sport History Review* 29, no. 1 (1998): 59–76.

<sup>78</sup> Cruikshank and Bouchier.

<sup>79</sup> Cruikshank and Bouchier, "Dirty Spaces: Environment, the State, and Recreational Swimming in Hamilton Harbour, 1870–1946."

<sup>80</sup> Kim Anderson, "Aboriginal Women, Water and Health: Reflections from Eleven First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Grandmothers," 2013, 1–32; Robert J Patrick, "Uneven Access to Safe Drinking Water for First Nations in Canada: Connecting Health and Place through Source Water Protection," *Health & Place* 17, no. 1 (2011): 386–89; Atanu Sarkar, Maura Hanrahan, and

Amy Hudson, "Water Insecurity in Canadian Indigenous Communities: Some Inconvenient Truths," *Rural and Remote Health* 15, no. 3354 (2015): 1–14.

<sup>81</sup> Patrick, "Uneven Access to Safe Drinking Water for First Nations in Canada: Connecting Health and Place through Source Water Protection."

<sup>82</sup> Sarkar, Hanrahan, and Hudson, "Water Insecurity in Canadian Indigenous Communities: Some Inconvenient Truths."

<sup>83</sup> Hanrahan, Sarkar, and Hudson, "Water Insecurity in Indigenous Canada: A Community-Based Inter-Disciplinary Approach."

<sup>84</sup> Galway, "Boiling over: A Descriptive Analysis of Drinking Water Advisories in First Nations Communities in Ontario, Canada."

First Nations) said, “the water is sick,” and, when “the water is sick,” the people become sick too.<sup>85</sup>

These ideas appear to have never been taken up in Canadian water governance despite the importance of water to health and the implications of living in conditions where water causes such ill-health.

*Water is life. Water is connected to everything we do in everyday life, and without access to safe, clean water, entire livelihoods are negatively impacted and altered. Education, relationships, economies, cultures, knowledges, spiritualities, identities, communities, food, health, and spirit are entangled with the quality and quantity of water.*<sup>86</sup>

The lack of safe, clean water in First Nations communities is entangled with the common (mis)understandings of water as commodity and property. Improving water (e)quality in First Nations communities requires Indigenous self-determination for water governance. However, the federal government and private corporations work together to ensure that First Nations communities do not have self-governance of the land and waters.<sup>87</sup>

The detrimental water (e)quality conditions in First Nations communities continue to demonstrate systemic barriers for First Nations peoples and inherent rights to govern water, which extend far beyond water (e)quality issues, and are rooted in capital, colonial, neoliberal power structures and systems.

## Purification and Settler Colonialism

Previous theorizations of Whiteness and purification in physical cultural spaces consider how discourses and practices in physical cultural spaces seek to purify and cleanse bodies, spaces, and social relations—all in ways that continue to reproduce ongoing settler colonial perspectives.<sup>88</sup>

The symbolic and material idea of water and its relationship to purification practices are historically embedded in colonial power systems and institutions. Upon arrival, settlers believed they were superior to First Nations peoples because of their “civilized” and “rational” ways of governing the land and water and peoples.<sup>89</sup> Settler colonial self-interest of controlling territory (including Indigenous peoples) is embedded in White supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism.<sup>90</sup> Settlers have worked to (un)imaginatively dispossess Indigenous peoples through discourses and practices of “purification,” “civilization,” and “assimilation” for hundreds of years.<sup>91</sup> The state actively imagined settlers as “productive,” “pure,” “clean,” “civilized,” and “rational,” while Indigenous peoples were actively (un)imagined as “unproductive,” “dirty,” “irrational,” “uncivil,” “savage,” “illegitimate,” and “non-human.”<sup>92</sup> Water was used symbolically and materially to “scrub” the “savage” clean and place them in residential schools or in remote

<sup>85</sup> K. Kraus, “Toronto Welcomes 2015 Sacred Water Walk,” Rabble, 2015, <https://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/krystalline-kraus/2015/07/toronto-welcomes-2015-sacred-water-walk>.

<sup>86</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?”, 72.

<sup>87</sup> Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Disposses? Comments from the Edge of an Empire,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 1 (2004): 165–82.

<sup>88</sup> Fusco, “Cultural Landscapes of Purification: Sports Spaces and Discourses of Whiteness.”

<sup>89</sup> Harris, “How Did Colonialism Disposses? Comments from the Edge of an Empire.”

<sup>90</sup> Susan M Hill, *The Clay We Are Made of: Haudenosaunee Land Tenure on the Grand River*, vol. 20 (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2017).

<sup>91</sup> Nancy Hudson-Rodd, “Nineteenth Century Canada: Indigenous Place of Dis-Ease,” *Health & Place* 4, no. 1 (1998): 55–66.

<sup>92</sup> Harris, “How Did Colonialism Disposses? Comments from the Edge of an Empire.”

communities (i.e. reservations) to destroy their culture and make room for the colonial system.<sup>93</sup>

While Woodworth lived in Dryden for eighteen years, she did not learn about the

**Settlers, like many of the researchers she encountered, view water as property, commodity, object, and machine, something to be overcome and controlled, whereas Anishinabe people view *nibi* as teacher, healer, responsibility, sacred, gift, family, identity, community, and home.**

Through the active colonial imagination of the settler identity in Canada and (un)imagining of indigeneity, the imperial state was established to dominate territories, land, water, and resources and dispossess Indigenous peoples. Settlers relied on physical power (violence) and the supporting infrastructure of the state (e.g., dams, mills, factories), often built on waterways, to dispossess Indigenous peoples from their lands.<sup>94</sup>

For example, Woodworth's birthplace of Dryden, a small settler town in northwestern Ontario, Canada, is reliant on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples for the operation and maintenance of their forestry, agriculture, and most notoriously, milling industry. The Dryden Reed (now, Domtar) paper mill was constructed alongside Wabigoon Lake and Wabigoon River in 1911. As operations were expanding, a lot of chemical waste was produced by the mill, and throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the mill dumped the resulting mercury waste into the English-Wabigoon river system.<sup>95</sup> The waste site still leaks mercury today, and mercury poisoning continues to severely impact health and wellbeing of the peoples and waters.<sup>96</sup>

deathly effects of mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows First Nation until an event on campus during the first year of her master's degree entitled, "Water is Life: Justice for Grassy Narrows."

*Then, in one pertinent moment, they said this was all due to the Dryden Reed Paper Mill dumping mercury in the river in the 1960s. There I was in the audience, frozen in my chair, stunned, like I could not breathe. "Did they just say Dryden?" I thought to myself.<sup>97</sup>*

Following this event, Woodworth examined news and media articles, interviews, images, and documentary films to better understand the history of mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows.

(Un)learning the history of her hometown community demonstrated how settler and Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are profoundly different and was profoundly integral to her decolonizing autoethnographic journey. These meanings assigned to land and water are oppositional and contradictory, and Indigenous Knowledges of water were completely absent from the kinesiology curricula. Settlers, like many of the researchers she encountered, view water as

<sup>93</sup> Hudson-Rodd, "Nineteenth Century Canada: Indigenous Place of Dis-Ease."

<sup>94</sup> Harris, "How Did Colonialism Disposses? Comments from the Edge of an Empire."

<sup>95</sup> D. Bruser and J. Poisson, "Ontario Knew about Grassy Narrows Mercury Site for Decades, but Kept It Secret," Toronto Star, 2017.

<sup>96</sup> D. Bruser and J. Poisson, "Signs of Mercury Poisoning in Grassy Narrows Youth, Say Japanese Experts," Toronto Star, 2016, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/09/20/signs-of-mercury-poisoning-in-grassy-narrows-youth-say-japanese-experts.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Woodworth, "Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?," 37.

property, commodity, object, and machine, something to be overcome and controlled, whereas Anishinabe people view *nibi* as teacher, healer, responsibility, sacred, gift, family, identity, community, and home.<sup>98</sup> Every person is inherently connected to the land and water that sustains them, but the ontological and epistemological teachings of settler colonialism and health education have made this relationship invisible and exploitative.

The community of Grassy Narrows First Nation is fundamentally connected to the life of the river. Water, in the form of a river, embodies connectivity and continuity, and provides a place in the universe for future generations.<sup>99</sup> A river is a source of the knowledge that people require to survive, which has a physical basis (our bodies need water), as well as spiritual (defining the role of humans in the world), emotional (providing strength and vision), and intellectual (developing the minds of the knowledge holders) aspects.<sup>100</sup> Deborah McGregor (Anishinabe, Whitefish River First Nation)<sup>101</sup> describes, “The river provides a holistic metaphor between people and the rest of Creation.” The flow of water teaches us how to live, move, and be with each other.<sup>102</sup>

However, in the 1950s, settlers transformed the English-Wabigoon river system with dams, changing the landscape from a natural river system equally flowing between and among communities to a man-made channel diverting water from the powerless to the powerful. While the dams physically diverted water, they also symbolically diverted attention away from Grassy Narrows First Nation (and the other First Nations communities) and towards Dryden (and other settler communities). The hydro damming

flooded and destroyed sacred sites and wild rice beds, which were historically significant cultural places for Grassy Narrows.<sup>103</sup> These practices that controlled the power of water represent (White) man-made governance and settler colonial ideologies to conquer and dominate.

Despite the transformation of the river system, the people of Grassy Narrows First Nation remain deeply connected to the river and they have never stopped fighting for justice. They continue to resist dispossession and dehumanization from the dominant settler society. Important to discuss, there are other First Nations communities deeply affected by the mercury poisoning in the English-Wabigoon river system that remain invisible to the state, media, and public. Their struggles are equally as important, yet they are largely ignored and dismissed within the nation state, and the health inequities and struggles are not reported in Canadian media and public health research. Apart from a few media articles and mentions in Grassy Narrows-focused articles, the other communities downstream from Dryden, such as Whitedog First Nation, do not receive attention from the media and by the public. John Paishk (Chief of Whitedog First Nation) said, “It’s very sad. Our country doesn’t realize or recognize that there is a problem here.”<sup>104</sup>

Once settlers established an imaginative (imperial state) and physical (state infrastructure) threat and domination, colonial culture and settler discourses have systematically taken hold and been reproduced throughout Canada, though in different ways, contexts, dynamics, and formations. To continually colonize and access the land, water, and peoples, the state

<sup>98</sup> Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*.

<sup>99</sup> Deborah McGregor, “Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and Our Future,” *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3/4 (2004): 385–410.

<sup>100</sup> McGregor. “Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment, and Our Future.”

<sup>101</sup> McGregor, 85.

<sup>102</sup> Giselle Lavalley, *Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and Source Water Protection: First Nations’ Views on Taking Care of Water* (Toronto, ON: Chiefs of Ontario, 2006).

<sup>103</sup> Free Grassy, “Free Grassy,” 2017.

<sup>104</sup> Brusser and Poisson, “Signs of Mercury Poisoning in Grassy Narrows Youth, Say Japanese Experts.”

relied, and still relies, on discourses and myths of “purity” and “emptiness.” Such discourses of “purity” have worked to reinforce Eurocentric settler-colonial knowledge, science, and education systems, while at the same time actually destroying Indigenous Knowledges through pollution and ecological degradation.<sup>105</sup>

To unsettle discourses of purification and Whiteness in kinesiology and physical cultural spaces, and to address ongoing water (e)quality issues that adversely impact Indigenous peoples (as well as Black other and marginalized communities),<sup>106</sup> research must aim to build and support a decolonial water education. This can only be achieved if everyone in physical cultural spaces (researchers, educators, coaches and trainers, managers, business owners, staff, athletes, participants and volunteers) disrupt and dismantle settler colonial structures and systems that shape knowledge production in these spaces.

*I acknowledge and respect my colleagues who have built and laid the groundwork for my research in the various subdisciplines. At the same time, I hope to expand and disrupt and decolonize the conventional ways kinesiology researchers have understood bodies, environments, and, most importantly, waters.*<sup>107</sup>

## Decolonial Water Education

As mentioned previously, there are scholars in the field of kinesiology who are actively working to decolonize and deconstruct racialized Western scientific paradigms and social injustices that

have marginalized Black and Indigenous peoples, and other racialized communities.

However, much of what is valued in kinesiology and everyday Canadian physical cultural spaces continue to lack a fundamental comprehension and integration of Indigenous Knowledges or a decolonial praxis. To build a more comprehensive and integrative approach to understanding the human body, researchers and educators must

**For Anishinabe  
Elders, *nibi* is both  
the basis of life and  
is alive.**

abandon, de-centralize and disrupt the Eurocentric canon that dominates health education in Canada. Therefore, by moving beyond kinesiology and sharing knowledge and perspectives from outside the field, this decolonizing autoethnographic research provides suggestions for *decolonial water education*.

Decolonial water education connects, respects, and honors different knowledge systems to understand water in a holistic way. Decolonial water education is physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual, and will require integrating Indigenous Knowledges into kinesiology to open up to connections between mind, body, spirit, and water. Decolonial water education values Indigenous ceremonial practices in their many and diverse material, psychological, epistemological, and spiritual forms. As Indigenous Knowledges are diverse and distinct, due to the embedded knowledge in the land unique to local contexts and geographies,<sup>108</sup> decolonial water education includes different pedagogies, shapes, configurations, formations, processes, and implications depending on context (places and peoples).

<sup>105</sup> Harris, “How Did Colonialism Disposses? Comments from the Edge of an Empire.”

<sup>106</sup> Laura Pulido, “Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism” (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

<sup>107</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?”, 53.

<sup>108</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*; McGregor, “Honouring Our Relations: An Anishnaabe Perspective.”

Accordingly, the desired outcomes of decolonial water education will be diverse in order to unsettle Whiteness and settler colonial relations of power that threaten Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.<sup>109</sup> This requires learning from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Holders, in their traditional Indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are both a gift and responsibility, which must be cared for and spoken with responsibly. For example, Anishinabemowin teaches through every word that the world is alive and that the language is alive itself.<sup>110</sup> When talking about a river, the language expresses the life of the water and her interconnections with the rest of Mother Earth.<sup>111</sup>

For Anishinabe Elders, *nibi* is both the basis of life and is alive.<sup>112</sup> *Nibi* is viewed as spirit, or carries spirit, and is capable of establishing relationships with other life forms.<sup>113</sup> As *nibi* is alive, *nibi* must be respected as a living being. *Nibi* is understood to have feelings, carrying memories and emotions, and if *nibi* is not treated with care and respect, *nibi* can become sad and/or angry, and can experience historical traumas just as people can.<sup>114</sup> Every waterbody is believed to have unique personalities and responsibilities, which require different forms of respect and acknowledgment.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, *nibi* is a gift and a sacred medicine with immense cleansing and purifying powers, and is not meant to be bought or sold.<sup>116</sup> *Nibi* must be clean and respected, free from physical and moral pollutions. For decolonial water education on

Anishinabe territory, it is essential for the courses and curriculum to be grounded in Anishinabe teachings of *nibi*. Anishinabekwe Elders and Knowledge Holders must be the primary educators to share teachings of *nibi* and how to live harmoniously in relationship with *nibi*.

The premise of decolonial water education is to revitalize cultural knowledge and histories that were destroyed through settler colonialism/colonization and provide pathways for decolonial futurities that are rooted in traditional Indigenous values and connections to the land and waters.<sup>117</sup> Decolonial futurities describe the reparation of self and reconciliation of community through (re)imagining and dismantling the colonial state for Indigenous and Black liberation. Decolonial futurities are deeply and intimately rooted in *decolonial love*, a framework for sociopolitical transformation that is central to the imagining and reparation of settler-colonial Canada.<sup>118</sup> For decolonial water education, a politic of decolonial love must be embraced and embodied, and the central force for reparation.

Importantly, decolonial water education is continuous, like a circle, without a beginning, middle, or end, and requires time, patience, and continuous effort. While mainstream academic institutions have historically erased Indigenous values and connections to the land and waters, there is some recent evidence that this can

<sup>109</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

<sup>110</sup> Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*.

<sup>111</sup> Kimmerer.

<sup>112</sup> McGregor, "Indigenous Women, Water Justice and Zaagidowin (Love)."

<sup>113</sup> Anderson, "Aboriginal Women, Water and Health: Reflections from Eleven First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Grandmothers."

<sup>114</sup> Anderson.

<sup>115</sup> Anderson, "Aboriginal Women, Water and Health: Reflections from Eleven First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Grandmothers."

<sup>116</sup> Lavalley, *Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and Source Water Protection: First Nations' Views on Taking Care of Water*.

<sup>117</sup> Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

<sup>118</sup> Jasmine Feather Dionne, "Decolonial Futurities: Intersecting Gender, Law, and Indigeneity," n.d.

change.<sup>119</sup> It is clear that there is endless work to be done to continue to enhance our understanding of water and to build relationships with *nibi*. The body, mind, spirit, and culture are always connected, and curricula must be re-balanced to teach water (and connections to land and nature) through a holistic and decolonial praxis.

### Continuing to Place the Water in Physical Cultural Spaces

To engage in a decolonizing autoethnography means over-coming many hurdles, barriers, boundaries, structures, and ideologies in the field of kinesiology and in the larger academic institution, while critically and openly reflecting on one's life as White women and Western researchers living on Anishinabek and Haudenosaunee territory.

Our own research has prioritized truth, love, gratitude, and hope, while challenging, critiquing, and disrupting colonial systems, knowledges and practices. By learning from Anishinabe Water Walkers, Elders, and Knowledge Holders, one learns how the Mother Earth Water Walks build relationships between people and *nibi*, while evolving one's own relationships with Mother Earth. As Kimmerer<sup>120</sup> writes: "It was an architecture of relationships, of connections that I yearned to understand. I wanted to see the shimmering threads that hold it all together."

In this paper, experiences, reflections, critiques, and actions for decolonizing education are shared, while acknowledging White settler women's responsibilities. In a decolonizing autoethnography such as this, the aim is to change the way knowledge is represented, controlled, owned, shared, accessed, and

protected in kinesiology faculties across Canada. Woodworth's aim was to help build, support, and enhance decolonial water education in the field of kinesiology and physical cultural spaces more broadly by highlighting the virtual absence of water in such spaces.

**By establishing a relationship between people's waterbodies—both the external waterbodies that gift us life and our internal physical human waterbodies—we acknowledge that there is a profound need to study, teach, and learn about water (and land) in kinesiology from Indigenous educators.**

By establishing a relationship between people's waterbodies—both the external waterbodies that gift us life and our internal physical human waterbodies—we acknowledge that there is a profound need to study, teach, and learn about water (and land) in kinesiology from Indigenous educators. While many scholars, inside and outside the field of kinesiology, laid the foundations for this research, this journey was undertaken to extend methodologies, pedagogies, practices, and pathways for decolonizing in the field. Importantly, decolonizing is a never-ending and unsettling personal journey dependent on context (place, people, scale, relationality), requiring significant time and effort, through the building of reciprocal relationships of respect and responsibility with Indigenous peoples, for

<sup>119</sup> Cappucine Ferguson et al., "U of T Hires Two Indigenous Academic Advisors in Response to TRC: Breaking down the University's Path toward Reconciliation," *The Varsity*, 2019,

<https://thevarsity.ca/2019/10/06/u-of-t-hires-two-indigenous-academic-advisors-in-response-to-trc/>.

<sup>120</sup> Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. 46.

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pathways to Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and futurities.

Established through Woodworth's decolonizing autoethnography, the goals of decolonial water education in kinesiology are to:

- (1) Support Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and futurities, in their many, diverse material, psychological, epistemological, and spiritual forms.
- (2) Teach people the value of water, and stewardship from the perspective of water.
- (3) Connect, respect, and honor Indigenous Knowledges to understand water in a holistic way.
- (4) Unsettle settler colonialism, deconstruct and disrupt Whiteness and colonial ways of thinking and acting, and oppose and resist colonial relations of power that threaten Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.
- (5) Enhance attention to the connection of water to health equity while advocating for greater racial and ethnic diversity within undergraduate and graduate programs, course curricula, research, hiring, and teaching practices in kinesiology faculties and physical cultural spaces across Canada.<sup>121</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

As Indigenous Knowledges are diverse and distinct, decolonial water education will have different pedagogies, shapes, configurations, formations, processes, and implications depending on the educational context (places and peoples). This research does not intend to make "one-size-fits-all" claims or statements about decolonial water education, but, rather, attempts to share pathways for decolonizing education in physical cultural spaces. As the

tensions and struggles observed in the field of kinesiology are reflective of those in other academic fields and disciplines, other fields should consider applications of decolonial water education.

Decolonial water education will always be context-dependent; as such, these suggestions are intended to act as guidelines for reflection and introspection for researchers and to be aware of how research can proceed in flows and ebbs within settler-colonial institutions. Decolonizing is a personal journey, through the learning of one's responsibilities to unsettle colonial ideologies and power systems. Everyone who is working in physical cultural spaces (researchers, educators, coaches and trainers, managers, business owners, staff, athletes, participants and volunteers) needs to learn how water is important to their pedagogies and practices, and how they can better teach the value and importance of water.

However, despite best efforts, decolonizing education will never completely succeed if academic institutions continue to be governed and structured through, and by, Whiteness, settler-colonialism, and neoliberal capitalism. What is certain is that the Eurocentric academy needs decolonizing; though, what that looks like will be situated, contextual, diverse, and dependent on the peoples and places. To unsettle and disrupt Whiteness and settler-colonialism in the academy, researchers and educators can work to transform their pedagogies and practices by learning with and from Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Holders and teachers, and by making their classrooms and research projects places and spaces for decolonizing.

Decolonial water education can teach us that our lives, as humans, are dependent on water, because of the fundamental connection that

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<sup>121</sup> Woodworth, "Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where's the Water in Kinesiology?"

binds the waters within our waterbodies and the waterbodies that sustain us.<sup>122</sup>

*There is much to do, and much to learn and unlearn. It does not matter who you are, everyone has their own roles, rights, and responsibilities for decolonization. It is important to figure out where you are on your own journey, and how you will use your voice and privileges to move forwards for decolonizing, like a river, all day long, without stopping or ever turning back.*<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Anderson, “Aboriginal Women, Water and Health: Reflections from Eleven First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Grandmothers.”

<sup>123</sup> Woodworth, “Decolonizing Autoethnography: Where’s the Water in Kinesiology?”, ix.