



Aboriginal Youth and Their Experiences in Physical Education: “This Is What You’ve Taught Me”

Expériences des jeunes autochtones en matière d’éducation physique: « C’est ce que tu m’as enseigné. »

**Joannie M. Halas
University of Manitoba**

In this paper, I incorporate Shawn Wilson’s (2008) understanding of relationality and relational accountability as I tell the story of my own involvement with Aboriginal youth and the lessons they have taught me about their experiences in physical education. For years, I have been challenged to find ethical ways to share the perspectives of the young people who have chosen to take time to work with me in my research program. Shawn Wilson’s book, *Research as Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* provides the direction I was seeking as I use his integrated approach of blending the personal with the professional, science with art, to communicate my research findings. By writing an open letter to the Aboriginal youth who I’ve worked with over the course of my career, I hope to respectfully convey their thoughts and ideas about physical education. In an initial qualitative research study involving Aboriginal youth, the youth told me how they want to be involved in their school gyms and sports teams, and how they have many role models encouraging them to be active. They also told me about not being active; how the change room, difficulty fitting in, and racism keeps them from fully participating. In this paper, I share what they’ve told me in a personal narrative that also includes autoethnographic reflections (Carrington, 2008; Richardson, 2000) designed to show how my thinking on race, whiteness and equity has been influenced by my relationships with Aboriginal youth. By sharing what I have been taught, I hope physical educators will be inspired to create more inclusive and culturally affirming physical education climates for all youth, and in particular, for Aboriginal youth in Canada.

*Dans cet article, j’intègre les notions de lien relationnel et d’imputabilité rationnelle de Shawn Wilson (2008) dans le récit de mon implication auprès de jeunes autochtones et des connaissances acquises sur leurs expériences en éducation physique. J’essaie depuis longtemps de trouver des façons éthiques de partager les points de vue des jeunes qui ont choisi de donner de leur temps pour appuyer mon programme de recherche. Le livre de Shawn Wilson, qui s’intitule *Research as Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, propose les orientations que je cherchais puisque j’utilise son approche intégrée qui consiste à amalgamer le personnel et le professionnel, la science et l’art, pour*

communiquer les résultats de mes recherches. En écrivant une lettre ouverte aux jeunes autochtones avec qui j'ai travaillé au fil de ma carrière, j'espère présenter respectueusement leurs idées et opinions au sujet de l'éducation physique. Dans le cadre d'une première recherche qualitative engageant des jeunes autochtones, ces derniers m'ont dit combien ils désirent faire partie des équipes athlétiques et sportives de leur école et combien ils ont de modèles les encourageant à être actifs. Ils m'ont aussi parlé de leur inactivité, expliquant que des facteurs comme le vestiaire, les problèmes d'intégration et le racisme les empêchent de participer pleinement. Dans cet article, je partage ce qu'ils m'ont confié dans un récit personnel qui comprend des réflexions auto-ethnographiques (Carrington, 2008; Richardson, 2000) où j'explique en quoi mes réflexions au sujet de la race, de la blancheur et de l'équité ont été influencées par mes rapports avec ces jeunes autochtones. En partageant ce qu'ils m'ont enseigné, j'espère que les enseignants d'éducation physique seront inspirés à créer des contextes d'éducation physique plus inclusifs et plus culturellement ouverts qui profiteront à tous les jeunes, et particulièrement aux jeunes autochtones du Canada.

“This is what you’ve taught me”

“If I hadn’t believed it, I wouldn’t have seen it”

(Wilson, 2008, p. 6)

In the opening paragraphs of the book *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Shawn Wilson (2008) identifies two key principles of indigenous approaches to research: relationality and relational accountability.¹ Research is ceremony, he writes, it is a process whereby the relational distance between the cosmos and ourselves is bridged and a raised consciousness of our world is produced. Relationality, as an expression of indigenous worldviews, emerges through the process of forming relationships. As these relationships evolve, the aspect of relational accountability is present. This relational accountability acknowledges mutual respect individuals should develop if relationships are ethically grounded. Drawing upon his own indigenous oral traditions, Shawn elaborates on these interconnected principles in a narrative that blends the personal with the professional, using a mix of literary techniques to convey the deep, cultural roots that shape his own approach to research. What emerges is both a literal and literary blurring of the boundaries between science and art.

Through this departure from mainstream scholarly traditions, Shawn invokes relational accountability by writing himself into his research. In the telling of his own story, Shawn incorporates ideas and teachings that have been passed down through generations of indigenous knowledge keepers. To engage with his ideas of relational accountability, readers schooled in traditional Western notions of scientific inquiry are prompted to abandon their idolized notions of objectivity, that academic conceit whereby ideas are de-contextualized and presented as forms of universal truth.² Shawn Wilson encourages us to think otherwise, to acknowledge our presence in the “relationship” with our ideas and the processes by which they are formed. Within indigenous approaches, the researcher’s own relationship with her or his ideas must be accounted for.

Shawn expands his notion of relational accountability to also include the relationship between himself as the storyteller (i.e., the researcher talking about his or her research), the readers of the story, and the ideas that are presented.

Particularly in cross-cultural contexts, where it is often challenging to find common ground, he suggests that, “the reader must be able to understand the writer’s beliefs in order to see what the writer sees” (Wilson, 2008, p. 7). By so openly conveying his own stated belief systems where relationships are reality and epistemological ways of knowing are relational, Shawn demonstrates how relational accountability is intrinsic to an indigenous methodology and axiology (i.e., values).

I provide this interpretation of Shawn’s ideas not as an indigenous researcher, but as a non-Aboriginal physical education scholar who works interculturally with Aboriginal youth within (mostly) urban communities. In striving to understand what I have been taught and have learned in my many personal and professional encounters with young people from diverse Aboriginal cultural backgrounds, I continually look for guidance from indigenous voices. In doing so, I have worked hard to loosen the constraints of my own white, eurocentric patterns of seeing and being in the world (Halas, 2006). To do ethical research within a context of structural inequality requires humility. In my case, I take this as a call to continually make visible the unearned privileges of my societal position (i.e., white, middle class, older, educated, in a position of authority ... in relation to Aboriginal youth and young people from other marginalized positions, see McIntosh, 1989; Dyer, 2003). I also struggle to unlearn the deeply affecting racist, sexist, heterosexist (etc) beliefs that I have acquired from my own Canadian cultural landscapes; those engrained colonial patterns of seeing and believing that freely circulate within and beneath my consciousness.

Interpreting the shared intercultural spaces between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is a complex endeavor, and is particularly intense within the “contact zones” (Pratt, 1991) of the public school gym where I most often locate my research program.³ In dialogue with indigenous scholars, including his father Stan Wilson (who, coincidentally, was a member of my PhD supervisory committee), Shawn states that, “lots of the lessons and relationships that need to be learned and developed in order to understand complex ideas require a lifetime of analysis” (p. 120).

For me, “lifetime of analysis” captures the process that I have engaged with throughout the course of my career as a physical educator working with young people from diverse backgrounds. This engagement is informed by the cautionary words of Métis educator Amy Carpenter (2010) who speaks to the limitations of our personal analyses in an intercultural world: “no matter how interconnected we are, we still see others’ stories and worlds through our own knowings” (p. 45). This is particularly true within the intercultural landscapes of Canada’s public schools where the predominantly white teaching force is encountering students from increasingly diverse backgrounds. On the Canadian prairies (the context of this research), Aboriginal youth are one of the fastest growing segments of the overall population (United Way, 2010), and as such, present great potential as current and future leaders in our society. They bring with them a rich cultural heritage that includes highly sophisticated, egalitarian economic and social systems that produced healthy communal band societies for thousands of years, pre-contact with the Europeans (Champagne, 2006). There is a rich historical legacy that is only beginning to claim space within the Canadian public school system, which remains centred on white, western, Eurocentric ideologies,

curricula and practices (Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Aboriginal Education Research Committee, 2010).

Given the enduring context of societal inequality, intercultural work requires the constant interrogation of one's own beliefs, and particularly for white scholars, a reflexivity around whiteness and how identities are produced and sustained within unfolding relations of domination that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced (Frankenberg, 1993). In Canada, the invisibility of whiteness and the denial of racism contributes to the privileging of white peoples and the marginalization of Aboriginal and other racialized minorities (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). These dual realities penetrate the day-to-day cultural landscapes of Aboriginal youth and contribute to the "crisis story" discourses that shape and constrain who and what young people from diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis backgrounds can become.

The educational landscapes of Aboriginal youth are affected by the socio-historical context of colonization and cultural genocide enacted upon generations of families via the residential school system that systematically removed children from their families and communities to be educated in under-funded, low quality and often abusive school environments (Miller, 1997). Contemporary relations between Aboriginal peoples and the larger Canadian society are also shaped by neo-liberal political policies that have contributed to the rise in spatially concentrated racialized poverty through the purposeful withdrawal of the state from its social obligations (Silver, 2011).⁴ Over time, I have come to appreciate how the intersecting oppressions of poverty and racism contribute to the discursive practices that pathologize Aboriginal youth, focusing attention on 'fixing' them/their behaviours while the social and economic conditions that lead to deep inequality remain unaddressed⁵ (see Halas & Hanson, 2001). The more I work to understand how colonization, racism and whiteness distort and reproduce negative discourses and stereotypes that materialize within the day-to-day lives of Aboriginal youth, the more accountable I become to say, 'this is my responsibility'.

Why it's taken so long to write: Unpacking the preconceptions and unearned privileges of the white scholar ...

"Our bodies and our politics are not neutral territory; the complexities of power are inscribed within us. What we choose to ignore, we choose to let exist." (McRae, 2003, p. 2)

Interrogating one's own pre-conceptions is one stop on the journey toward relational accountability. Another is the need to acknowledge, question and disrupt the unearned and invisible advantages of being a member of a privileged/oppressor group (McIntosh, 1989; Dyer, 2003). Over the past twelve years of my academic life, I have constantly been challenged to find the courage to step beyond the dominant philosophies, policies and practices of Western science that shape and constrain our professional ways of knowing, being and doing (i.e., achieving and succeeding) in the universe of academia. This challenge has weighed me down, metaphorically filling my backpack with bricks of as yet unpublished data, constantly demanding I disseminate those initial findings from my earliest studies according to an academic timetable, relational accountability be damned. I have held onto that early, unpublished data for a number of reasons,

not the least of which being that for the longest time I struggled to address it with integrity.

My own position as a non-Aboriginal, white researcher contributed to my hesitation to write this story.⁶ Inequitable advantages, and the unearned, invisible “breeze at my back” (Kimmel, 2003) propels my academic career in advantageous ways not available to Aboriginal and racialized minority scholars. My research program with Aboriginal youth is also marked by the indelible link between Western imperial research and colonialism (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As a white researcher, I have sought to understand the historical legacy of exploitation and subjugation experienced by indigenous peoples who have participated in Western science/research projects. I feel responsible to stop these patterns of injustice in my own research, including my collaborative work with students and colleagues. The emergence of indigenous scholars taking up research in their own communities (including my own Métis graduate students, Amy Carpenter, Louise Champagne & Heather McRae) prompts me to focus attention on ways to support them in the telling of their own stories. Yet, as Elder Alex Nelson noted at the 2005 Aboriginal Sport Research Symposium (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2006), we need to work together in the intercultural “meeting places” where the square and the circle (white and Aboriginal cultures) overlap. Situated within that overlapping intercultural space, I am constantly learning how to best position myself as an ally, always, as Aboriginal scholar Laara Fitznor (personal communications, 2010) advises, walking beside or behind Aboriginal peoples.

I have also hesitated because there was so much of my own pre-conceived “knowings” that I had to first interrogate, and no process for communicating the perspectives of the young people I had encountered in a way that I thought would properly honour them. Our mainstream codes of ethical practice ask our research study participants to sign a form giving over rights to the researcher; in turn, the youth participants might get a few dollars for their contribution to the data collection. This exchange is a partial realization of the potential benefits of the research, which are typically societal (i.e., diffuse and incremental). Far more immediate and tangible are the benefits accrued by the researcher once the findings are published (e.g., status, promotion, increased salary, in relation to a \$10 honoraria). The distorted presumption of equity in that exchange alone requires thoughtful reflection and critical action, figuratively adding more pounds to the backpack, a symbolic weight of responsibility to be carried daily in our intercultural practice. However uncomfortable, our own complicity in *sustaining* the unequal relations of power/benefits requires constant interrogation.

Over the past decade, hundreds of young Aboriginal men and women have shared their perspectives with me (or our research team) regarding their lives. My commitment to them has always been that I would do everything I could to make physical education programs better, more meaningful. ‘*Tell me what you’d like me to tell your teachers*’⁷ is what I’d often say as an explanation/act of reciprocity within a particular research study.⁷ Ten years later, the concepts of relationality and relational accountability articulate for me the personal belief that I can share what I’ve been told in new ways that will respect the original storytellers, that is, the youth who have chosen to speak with me.

Research as a celebration of Aboriginal youth

Shawn Wilson's writing provides direction for all of us seeking insights about our intercultural world. Through use of the literary devices of story, personal narratives addressed to his sons, and academically-styled writing to capture two voices, one personal, one academic, he defines for his readers a collaborative view on indigenous research methods. He responds to academics who may not be accustomed to this form of presentation by writing:

Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers. It is my hope that readers of this book will begin to question some of their own beliefs about the way research needs to be conducted and presented, so that they can recognize the importance of developing alternative ways of answering questions. (p. 6)

His writing style creates a path for relational accountability, and in doing so, invites us to question our beliefs.

In this mixed narrative account that includes autoethnographic reflections (Carrington, 2008; Richardson, 2000), I share what I have learned from an early research encounter with Aboriginal youth who reflected on their experiences in physical education and physical activity.⁸ As a means to honour the young people I've spoken with, I also want to acknowledge my relationship with Shawn Wilson's work, and the teachings of other indigenous scholars who share their worldviews and perspectives about indigenous research. Written as an open letter to Aboriginal youth who I have worked with over the course of my career, I take up Shawn's call for relational accountability by writing myself into the presentation of data. My letter to the young people is formatted in both italics and regular font. In keeping with Shawn's style of blending the personal with the academic, I *italicize autoethnographic reflections and flashbacks* as a way of showing how I've come to know what I know and how I have tried to convey this knowledge (i.e., as expressions of relationality and relational accountability).

My hope is that physical education scholars and teachers will read this article and hear what the youth have told me in ways that will motivate them to question their own beliefs and assumptions about their teaching practices and relationships with Aboriginal students in their classes, including how they themselves have been taught to think about race, whiteness and equity. And borrowing once more from the lessons Amy, Louise and Heather have taught me, and from what Shawn Wilson and other indigenous scholars advise: I write this with the intent of an open mind and a good heart ... as a means to celebrate Aboriginal youth and all they teach us.

What you've told me about your experiences in physical education and physical activity

So ... it's taken me a long time to write about what I've learned from listening to you over all these years. And it's been a lot of years. From my teenage memories of working at the youth drop-in centre in the north end of Winnipeg, those long-gone days in the 1980's when the school gyms were open all summer long through to the last six years of our intercultural Rec and Read after school mentor programs, we've learned a lot and laughed a lot together. I remember the day at the drop-in when Ricky came in and grabbed a coke from the fridge in our make-shift office; he wouldn't pay the 25 cents and I followed him out the door to the gym, calling out to no one in particular, "hey everyone,

don't date Ricky cause he's cheap ...” Ricky turned around and with a sheepish grin pulled out a quarter from his pants pocket to give to me. He almost had me this time. Perhaps next time he'd get the better of me? As an initial challenge in the contact zone I was happy that it ended with both of us keeping our integrity intact ...

We had tons of fun in those days; day trips to the outdoor pool at the city park, baseball games out on the field, floor hockey in the gym, and oh so many lost hours of shooting hoops. We laughed and played and those of you who hung out at the drop-in were my first introduction to Aboriginal youth culture ...

After a decade teaching phys ed in the public school system, I became a “professor” at our local university. I wasn't always comfortable in this new role; in material, symbolic and psychological ways, professors are positioned on top of the hierarchical food chain and I don't like hierarchies. But I do believe in university education and in my interview for the job, I immediately thought of you. I asked the hiring committee how many Aboriginal students were filling the seats in their university classrooms. My soon-to-be colleagues thought there were maybe one or two, but they weren't sure. So many gifted athletes, so many active youth, what was keeping you from studying physical education in university? To answer that question I knew I had to go and talk to you, see what was happening in your high school phys ed classes.

So I did. I got a grant, which is what we do as researchers, and I set up a series of focus group interviews where I asked you to tell me about your experiences in phys ed. And then, for reasons I've tried to explain at the start of this paper, I thought for a long time about how to communicate what you've said. For years, actually, never quite sure ... until I read Shawn Wilson's book.

In what follows, I summarize the key themes that we were able to construct out of our focus group conversations. I spoke with over 70 Aboriginal youth attending school at three urban high schools, commencing first year university courses, or working in community recreation. Where possible, I spoke with the same youth participants on two occasions and as much as possible, I hired the few Aboriginal students in our undergraduate or graduate programs to assist with the interviews and analysis. Because the majority of youth were not available for follow-up interviews, it was rare that I was able to have the original participants provide feedback on the themes that were constructed from the data. In order to build on my understanding of what you were telling me, I would gather a new group of Aboriginal youth together, present to them the themes as I understood them, and invited their feedback on my interpretations. This input further informed the analysis. I also used it to inform my professional work, including my presentations to teachers, my university teaching, my next research proposal, and the community-based, intercultural physical activity programs that we are co-creating now.

This is what you told me ... and this is how I understand it.

Aboriginal youth want to be involved in physical activity in their schools and communities

In interview after interview, many of you spoke about your love of sports and physical activity, which corresponds to recent research indicating that 69% of Aboriginal children aged 6-14 years play sports at least once a week (Smith, Findlay & Crompton, 2011). From pick-up hockey to organized school sport,

lunch hour intramurals to playing outside, you wanted to play, compete and have fun. You seemed to really like mainstream sports like baseball, floor hockey, basketball and volleyball, often adding your own ideas about what it was that made these activities special:

I like hitting the ball ... stealing bases, catching the ball out in the field. I just like it see, when I'm batting, I like to pretend there's a big crowd behind me, cheering me on ... using my imagination.

I like floor hockey. I like being goalie cause it gives you a challenge and try and stop the puck. You can watch where it is going and it's really fast.

I liked the volleyball and basketball ... I guess the kinds of sports where everybody could feel involved.

Running. In gym, last year we had to do, sometimes, 19 laps, and, now that I've done that, I see myself that I can actually run that far and that, in that time, that I'm getting better, I've done it, and ... (quiet...)

Yeah (speaking about leaving the school for outside activities), every couple blocks you increase your ... like participation, like, doing laps, you know, heart rate ... You're challenging yourself. You're trying to beat your time, your other level, you know.

Mine (my favorite activity) was I went to track and field a few years and I was in long distance and long jump and I took first place in all of those and then I got ...there was like nothing to do cause like I took first place in all of them.

Hearing these stories reminded me of the times I watched you play basketball, volleyball, baseball and floor hockey in phys ed when I was still a teacher. Those sports were always popular, it seemed, although you liked a whole bunch of other sports too, along with track and field and even folk dancing (Halas, 1998). Do you remember that Friday afternoon "Manitoba versus Northern Ontario" volleyball match back at the treatment centre? We waited all week in anticipation, practicing and preparing for the big game. You were so proud of your roots and when Friday came, you played with the intensity of an Olympic final, save for the healthy laughter and slapstick antics between each point. In those days, at our school, it seemed that the more we created programs with you, the more you took part. Many of you told me the same thing when we spoke in those focus group interviews.

When I was living on the rez and when we had track and field with like other countries and that or whatever, I got gold in the final track (event).

Yeah it was actually a positive experience for me because we had like intramurals all the time and we would always play them so that everyone would just wait for lunch time to come because you could play the game.

The best experience is when you're kicking ass, when you're a part of a team.

I liked staying out ... play sports and going to like tournaments and that.

Yeah, when there's a bunch of guys on the court and you have the ball and you're like you get the ball on your side ... it's a rush 'cause you're just hogging the ball and you're like 'fuck this'.

You also told me that you loved to play hockey after school, take part in cultural activities, or simply hang out with friends in your communities:

Okay, my weekend. In the winter, I'd probably be playing hockey all weekend. Get together a couple of friends, play hockey. Summer time,

probably play basketball or football or anything that has contact in it.

I have two kid brothers where when I was a kid, I would have went outside and played with half a stick, no laces, and maybe a shoe, and I still would have played.

One of the things that I was thinking about, when I was younger the only physical activity that I used to do was that I used to be the best jigger (laughing), but now my style is outdated.

In the weeks, months and years after I did these initial interviews, I consistently tried to tell your gym teachers about what you had said and how you liked to be active and wanted to be involved. Not all the time, but often enough to matter, some teachers refused to hear this message. At one of the first education workshops where I was invited to share information from this study, a teacher aggressively challenged my assertion that "Aboriginal youth want to succeed in school."

"What evidence do you have?" he asked, in a surprisingly hostile tone. He then told me how the Aboriginal students in his class weren't showing up, because, he reckoned, "those kids just don't care about school."

I told him what you told me, but he couldn't see it, wouldn't see it. And his public challenge forced me to pause and question my own beliefs about what you were telling me, creating little pockets of doubt that lingered in my own mind, even as I made these claims on your behalf. I hadn't taught phys ed in the school system since the mid-90's, so I didn't have any recent, direct experiences of my own to draw upon as a counter to him. I only had what you had told me. It wasn't that I didn't believe you. I always believed what you said. It's that I didn't understand the depth of the disconnect between what you were saying and what some of your teachers were hearing or experiencing. I really didn't know what to do ... and I felt uncomfortably ill-prepared about how to communicate what you were telling me. One thing I knew ... I had a lot of work to do.

"If I wouldn't have believed it, I wouldn't have seen it," Shawn Wilson writes. For some teachers, is it possible that their underlying beliefs and assumptions about Aboriginal peoples and education makes it impossible for them to see how you wanted to be active and involved and engaged in school? How your family and friends were positive influences for you, motivating you to be active in life.

Your parents, family and friends help you to be active ...

In today's society, a majority of Canadian kids are less active than they used to be, and through socio-cultural, psychological, and educational research, we have come to see how there are many complex factors contributing to an individual's participation in physical activity. One thing we've learned is that parents play an important role in their kids' decisions to be active in sports and recreation (Canadian Fitness and Leisure Research Institute, 2006). It seemed to be the same for many of the Aboriginal youth in our interviews, as many of you spoke about your parents, siblings or friends encouraging you to be active.

With my family, my parents were very supportive in what we were doing, you know when I think about it, we were a very active family ... every time my dad was off work, we were out in the bush. We were doing the fishing, doing the canoeing, doing the hunting, doing the berry picking, very much a part of our lifestyle. And then when we were in school, you know they'd

say: “Get involved, go and do those things” (coming from my mom) ... that was playing in sports that mattered (baseball, football, hockey). You know go and do it, at least just try.

And they were very much a big influence, my parents. And then their family with their brothers and sisters were also very active because there was the canoe racing out in the lake and jumping in the canoes to see who is faster, and that was the competition again there with my mom and all her sisters and our relations all getting in the boat and they’re teasing each other: “Ah, there goes granny, ah there goes the paddle, or the canoes tipping (laughing).” That was very much a part of our lifestyle, that whole active piece.

In addition to your families, your friends were also your role models, as one of you said, “‘cause if they joined a team, I would too.” When I asked a group of you “who took you skating?” you replied:

My parents (my mom and my uncle).

My cousins taught me how to play hockey.

I don’t know. I have been playing sports for a long time. I was on a team for a while.

Joannie: With your family, friends?

My cousins and my older brother.

My brothers taught me how, because my dad was always working.

I’m not sure why I was surprised, but even for a number of the girls, it was a male role model who influenced them, whether it was their dad, cousins, friends or a teacher.

But I grew up in the country with my dog and my grandparents. I mean my Pop would take me skating and we would go play hockey and always, always hockey. Yeah, and you’re playing with the boys and you try to get your slap shot better than theirs (laughing), something to strive for, but I think that without that male kind of contact, I wouldn’t have done it. And that is something that I know happened outside of school.

I think my role model’s probably my first track coach... Um, he wasn’t a runner, apparently he was some kind of martial artist or kick boxer or something. It wasn’t because he was active or anything but it was just because he gave me a hard time, just you know, he actually had confidence in what I can do and just kept pushing me so as for my friends ... I may be a little biased ‘cause all my friends are on the track team and in PE, they’re pretty active.

In the 90’s, when I was living in the northwest part of Winnipeg, I returned from summer holidays to find my neighbourhood transforming in front of me. When a Native housing corporation bought a few side-by-side homes and turned them into rental housing units for Northern families, a significant number of my white neighbours sold their homes and moved away. Over time, new neighbours bought homes and in the mix of Aboriginal families who arrived were families who had moved to Canada from all corners of the world. Seeing these changes, a friend advised me to move, “before your property loses value.” Instead, I organized a block party so we could all meet each other.⁹

Walking door to door to deliver invites, I met a single mom living in one of the rental housing units across the street. When I mentioned the party, she immediately suggested we pull together a big baseball game for all the adults at

the local park. She organized the event and at the block party I vividly recall watching as one entire Filipino family took to the field while the rest of us, from different houses all along the street, stayed to bat. All the adults were playing while the kids watched from the sidelines, snatching random opportunities to chase after the ball when it rolled past the reach of their parents, aunts and uncles.

That baseball game illustrated the potential of sport as a vehicle for intercultural connections; that it was organized by an Aboriginal neighbour reminded me not only of the value of sport as an important aspect of Aboriginal culture but also of the community leaders who step up in quiet ways to promote active living. Thinking back to that type of leadership, I kept asking: where are the Aboriginal university students in physical education? What I learned from you not only helped to answer that question but prompted me to change the way I taught my mostly white students who would become future physical educators.

This is what keeps you from being active ...

Even though most of my experiences with Aboriginal youth involved their active engagement in sport and physical activity, I had heard from a number of teachers that their Aboriginal students weren't taking part in gym class; some were skipping phys ed and few were trying out for teams. So I asked you about this and I listened for a long time before I could really understand what you were saying to me. I knew that the culture of physical education is often exclusionary (as an interesting aside, an article with the title "we hate gym" {Carlson, 1995} has been cited in the research literature 186 times), so I expected that to be a large part of the problem. I think I was correct in that expectation, but it would take me a long time to fully appreciate just how the white, middle class structures, values and underlying ideologies of meritocracy, individualism and dominance (e.g., see Brantlinger, 2003) creates "contact zones" that are very oppositional to Aboriginal cultural values such as belonging, mastery, independence and generosity (see Brokenleg, 1998). In our conversations, you often spoke about changing for class, not fitting in, and racism as barriers to participation. Over time, I began to see what you were describing as manifestations of everyday racism, the "when, where, and how" racism operates in everyday routines and practices that are unrecognized, unacknowledged and unproblematized (i.e., they become normalized, Essed, 2002).

As I write this now, I remember how what you were telling me wasn't easy to talk about and I always appreciated that you tried.

Changing for class is a big issue

"What is it about changing that you don't like?" I asked, wanting to know more about your experiences in that very public/private space. Even as I asked the question, something inside me said, 'you shouldn't be doing this' ...

Winona was the only one who seemed interested in responding, and she replied without any hesitation: "'cause we have scars."

Scars? I wasn't expecting her to say 'scars'. What did she mean? In an instant, my mind raced but my lips didn't move.

Silence.

Too unsure to ask for clarification, I said "okay" and carried on to another question. I was embarrassed and for the first time all I could think about was how

completely insensitive it was to raise such personal questions about your bodies in such a public way, in front of each other. Still, Winona gave me an answer to my question and all I could do was say, "okay" and move on, afraid that any further discussion might add harm to whatever hurt Winona was drawing attention to. On that day, I know I didn't do a good job and I regret the lost opportunity to have been a better ally to you ...

For a period of time, my understanding of the intersecting oppressions of colonization, poverty and racism led me to over-generalize when thinking about the experiences of Aboriginal youth. Having taught at an adolescent treatment centre, I had known many Aboriginal youth who had lived very difficult lives. In my research and teaching, I worked very hard to interrupt my own and others' pathologizing of how you were viewed (e.g., see Halas & Hanson, 2001). When Winona had suggested that the change room was a space that Aboriginal youth disliked because they had "scars", I immediately interpreted her response to mean that Aboriginal youth have some kind of shared vulnerability about their bodies; I imagined the scars were physical remnants of the destruction of Aboriginal families and communities via the abuses of the residential schools and other colonial devices. But I never asked her to explain the context of her comments, allowing us to comprehend what her words were meant to convey... but many of you did explain to me, in very compelling detail, how the change rooms are also 'contact zones' where 'shit happens'.

Change rooms are social spaces where socially constructed norms are implicitly understood or overtly communicated, creating lots of 'homophobic, fatphobic, classist and racist' tensions (as one reviewer of this paper noted) that impact all students. These norms are often reinforced through unquestioned teacher practices and changing protocols and when you, your body, your behaviour or the clothes you wear fall outside the dominant norms, your vulnerability is exposed, as many of you noted:

At our school we have to wear shorts and t-shirts and some girls, I can say 'cause I'm a girl, aren't confident in wearing shorts. So, they would try to get by that wearing sweat pants and they weren't comfortable not changing ... and you know and the t-shirt, like we didn't have a uniform and it was shorts and a t-shirt (yeah), so, and they weren't allowed to wear sweaters. So then they would not go to gym, not change, if I can't wear what I want to wear to feel comfortable ...

The cool girls, or whatever they're called, they do that. It's kind of sad to see to like, if a girl is smaller or bigger ... like it's really sad to see and you're all pumped up and ready to go and everything like that and then you see some girls and they're in the corner and they're just sitting there like they don't even want to move, they'd just rather be in a dark hole than go to gym class because people can be rude and I think that's why they'd rather not change, they're shy of their bodies, they're shy and they're really unhappy that people are saying bad things about them so ...

The more you talked about problems in the change room, the more I respected why some of you were skipping class (Champagne & Halas, 2003). I could empathize with you because I remember hiding my own body when I was a kid in the change room, especially when I moved to a new school and had to change in front of kids I didn't know. And it was the same for some of you. Within Canada, many Aboriginal youth are required to leave their communities

to complete their high school education in larger provincially funded schools (Mendelson, 2008). Adapting to the culture and expectations of the new school can be a barrier to participation.

I am from a reserve and I never grew up in a town, and the culture that I am from for some reason (coming from northern Manitoba) we don't have, culturally, a change room like that. So, when my friends and me would go to Thompson or something and there is a change room and you see a guy all naked, that is weird for us, we don't feel comfortable. That's not part of our culture, unless they assimilate and leave their culture.

Some days I have a great time in gym class and then around grade 9 it's more annoying because they always make you wear your gym clothes ... and I never brought my gym clothes because I would forget and was never really organized.

I think it (my participation) just slowly tapered off by high school, with gym class you had to go and it was usually early in the morning and they never gave you enough time to get ready and to re-change to get to your classes, so then you were late for classes and you got in trouble from your teachers.

Joannie: So then they wouldn't let you participate because you don't have your gym clothes?

Yeah and they deduct marks.

Just so you know, my university students and I spend a lot of time talking about how uncomfortable the change room can be. We strategize ways to minimize the risk, like providing alternate changing spaces, staggering the number of students who change all at once (e.g., see Halas, 2004) or making it an option to change for class (Halas, 2002). But those are only partial remedies; what is most needed is to change the culture of the change room to a "safe house" (e.g., see Pratt, 1991), where being different is not only 'okay' but respected and the very white/western/capitalistic ideals of competition/domination do not extend to the presentation of our bodies. Most of my university students are empathetic to this issue; some aren't. Some still think wearing gym clothes should be a requirement of participation in class; they have difficulty believing that there might be more to changing for class than a student being lazy or disorganized. I wish it weren't like this ... I wish teachers would just change their change room policies. I wish they'd support students who feel vulnerable about their bodies.

Fitting in isn't easy ...

Here's a question I ask my third year university students on their midterm exam: Imagine that Manitoba's First Nations have not been colonized by the Europeans. If you were suddenly immersed in present day society that was structured on the values described in Louise Champagne's article, "Aboriginal Peoples in Historical Context", how would society be different than it is in present day Manitoba? And, how might these values influence the type of learning climate and PE program that you develop in the gymnasium, were you to apply these values in your day-to-day teaching practices?

To be genuinely inclusive, phys ed needs to become an especially welcoming space for kids who are 'fat' or unfit, less skilled, or coming from families with less money to buy brand name equipment or clothes. As a culturally white space (i.e., promoting western values such as competition, individualism,

domination), phys ed has typically been a place where hierarchies prevail: the skilled kids are valued more than the less skilled kids; boys are often seen as better athletes than girls; fit students get good marks, unfit students are left behind. I want to say that the culture of phys ed is changing, that the move to a curricular focus on active, healthy lifestyles is creating much-needed space for indigenous values such as belonging, mastery, independence and generosity, but we know this isn't yet the case.

In the gym, when larger societal hierarchies are reinforced or uninterrupted by the teacher's practices, students who find themselves on the low end of the rating scale can be discouraged from participating. Your observations outlined different scenarios that illustrate how an exclusionary culture of social comparison in the gym is reinforced through inappropriate teacher practices and the culture of the learning climate, where socially constructed hierarchies lead to "ingroup favoritism and outgroup exclusions" (Essed, 2002, p. 205).

Body size/low expectations: I was a little fat kid (laughing). I was the bigger kid, nobody expected me to be able to do anything so I didn't have to do anything and so I didn't. Of course you are in class with all these superior athletes and anything that I do just looks goofy and awkward so I am not going to do it (laughing).

Ability/picking teams: When you're in gym class and you play sports, they would have two captains and then you would take turns picking teams and it was like if you were the worst person you were always the last one getting picked and it would make you feel bad. You would be thinking to yourself: "I must be the worst one in here because I am always the last one being picked." It only motivates people that are good to continue on because they think, "I am good, I can do this" and they want to do it because it makes them feel good. People that aren't so good at it are discouraged more and more.

Ability/Favoritism: But the other one (the gym teacher) played the favoritism role. He would favor the football team and he wouldn't care about anybody else ... like, that's how he was.

Gender/Favoritism: When teachers are sexist because they want guys to go first, because that's how it was at one school for me. There were a lot of sexist teachers over there. There was one gym teacher I had, he was like a guy, like really old, he was like 'okay guys go first all the time'. I was like, when do the girls get to go first? It was always the boys to go first.

While the above noted tensions that arise are not unique to Aboriginal children and youth, their shifting ingroup and outgroup positions can be accentuated by the inequalities of race and class power relations that circulate daily in their lives.

Socio-economic/peer relations: I know that in my town, nobody was ever really rich, but if they had more money and they had the clothes and they had the needs to play the sports and they get to choose everything. They tended to be more confident and then they would involve themselves in more extra-curricular activities, and I find that too just the history of Aboriginal people tend not to be as wealthy as other people which might have a part to it because I have seen before, when I was younger my parents didn't have all this money to pay. A lot of sports are expensive, and it is really expensive to go in and it is really expensive to afford the equipment. If you wear a cheap pair of runners, you're going to have pain in your feet

and you're going to have all kinds of problems. A good pair of runners is like \$100 and I mean if you are on a tight budget and you're not from a family that can just give away money, then you can't meet the requirements and even if you try then you don't have the advantage (everyone is wearing all these brand names sports clothing and stuff), and when you walk in there they might not say anything to you but you are going to get looked at right away, every eye in the room.

Socio-economic/Competition: I moved to Winnipeg and I didn't really know anyone to get involved in sports, and it got really expensive too, joining sports, and my parents didn't have that money to dish out hundreds and hundreds of dollars for registration and equipment. So it made it (gym) almost a nuisance and I found too that it was worse in high school, it was very competitive. I mean if you weren't up to what everybody else is you don't feel like you're good and it doesn't encourage you to want to do it because to yourself you're looking like, "oh my God, I am not as good as they are and I look stupid doing this." It can be mean when it comes to that, and it can be discouraging.

If, as one of you said, "confidence grows" with each positive sport experience, phys ed teachers are challenged to address the distorted outcomes that inequitable opportunity creates. To be effective allies for Aboriginal students living in poverty, Champaign (2006) underlines the need for gym teachers to have relevant knowledge and understanding that will enable them to help Aboriginal students "make sense out of their social circumstances" so that they can develop positive self-esteem (p. 133).

Watching you these past few years, I have seen how much effort it takes to try to fit in, especially in large multicultural schools where there is little space for indigenous values within the deeply embedded whiteness that characterizes many public schools (van Ingen & Halas, 2006). I understand why some of you skip phys ed. When the public comparison of bodies, body types, and ability is set within a distorted context of unequal social, economic and cultural currency, it makes sense to avoid situations where you might be made to feel less able. And that's just the beginning.

Racism sucks

Probably the hardest thing for us to talk about was race. And racism. When the subject came up and I encouraged you to talk about it, I often felt bad, as if I was pressing a finger on an open sore, irritating a wound that you'd rather keep below the surface. Most white Canadians don't think about race. They don't see themselves and their own racialized white identity, and they deny the impact of racism and how prevalent it is in our society (Schick & St. Denis, 2005).

I distinctly remember that first focus group interview with a group of you, sitting in a circle on the second floor of the school. As soon as the conversation pointed in the direction of race and racism, a quiet descended over the room. You stopped talking and I wasn't sure whether to respect that silence or interrupt it. Waiting ... I was grateful when your teacher who was listening in the background prompted you, saying, "Tell her what you've been telling me, she wants to know..." I did want to know and I had a lot to learn. As a white person growing up in Winnipeg, I had been a witness to racism all my life. I was working hard to unlearn my own engrained patterns of racist thinking, those conscious and

subconscious beliefs about the superiority and inferiority of racialized groups that I had been socialized to believe since I was a kid. You and I were approaching the unfairness of our racially divided colonial society from entirely different positions, a reality that is never lost on me.

What I learned that day reinforced for me how important it is to ask you about your experiences growing up as an Aboriginal youth in our society. You often talked about how you felt you were treated differently, sometimes by teachers, sometimes by classmates, other times just walking down the street or going shopping.

That day when you first told me about being treated unfairly, I had a short conversation with one of your teachers who was a friend of mine. Before I could say a word about what you had just told me, my friend confidently asserted that, "there's no racism at our school." I looked at my friend and wondered to myself ... where do we start this conversation and how do we talk about race and racism?

My own understanding of race and the history of colonization's impact on indigenous peoples was quite late in developing; like most white Canadians, I didn't think of racism as part of Canada's national fabric. In nine years of my university education in physical education, I never once had a course that addressed race, colonization or the impact of white privilege. I say this not as an excuse, but to draw attention to how inadequate education has long lasting impacts. As an educator, it wasn't until the Oka Crisis in the fall of 1990 that I started to pay attention to how Canada's colonial history was impacting Aboriginal communities today; wanting to show solidarity with Aboriginal peoples and especially my Aboriginal students, I bought a sweatshirt with the words "Native pride, new beginnings" emblazoned on it (see Halas 2001). Oka forced me to question the grand mythologies I had ascribed to (e.g., Canada the kind, generous, tolerant nation, see Schick & St. Denis, 2005) and I began the process of developing a new understanding of my Canadian white identity. Early attempts to distinguish myself as anti-racist were expressed in awkward colorblind comments where I tried to deny that differences exist (do you remember when I said to you, "*I don't care if you're black, purple or orange ...?*"). Educators need to be 'color conscious', Tatum (1999) explains, not 'color blind'. When we acknowledge and affirm our students' racialized identities, we also unveil opportunities to incorporate our students' rich cultural knowledge within our classes. Unfortunately, few physical education teachers appear to enact culturally relevant practices and strategies within their classes (Flory & McCaughy, 2011), and from what you told me, fewer still acknowledge the existence of racism in your everyday lives.

Listening to you, I began to see how racism is everywhere, and especially in the differing perceptions between you and your mostly white teachers, who seemed to lack a critical social consciousness about what you were experiencing (Champagne, 2006). What you told me might help us as educators to understand these issues better. Your stories came in different shapes and sizes, but all of them spoke to the everyday racism, the difficult to pinpoint, accumulative, vicarious, nagging and annoying injustices that you have come to expect (Essed, 2002). For one of you, it was the experience of being the only players cut from a six-year old soccer team; how you didn't feel "wanted" because you and the other boy kicked off the team were the only two Natives. Other times, the feeling of

being treated differently couldn't be located in a single act alone. Rather, it was how you felt over time. Sometimes, the discriminatory actions were overt or observable, often witnessed in the treatment of your friends:

There is some white guys who say that all Indians do is smoke and stuff. The girls are more open though.

One of my friends was Aboriginal and she was always picked on. Including the teacher.

Joannie: Because she was Aboriginal?

Yes.

The school has always been like that. Even in our Native culture, we were burning sweet grass and our teacher got in trouble. They said that she was with us. They just jump to conclusions like that.

The presence of racial hierarchies seemed to be an invisible current running through the school, elevating some while leaving others with negative self-perceptions or feelings of being different:

It seems like for Native kids there is a wall always between us and then the other group. There are the Chinese (who can speak English) and then there is a big wall over here and we were always seemed to be excluded no matter what. In my little group (we were Native) some of my friends they were really into sports but they just didn't seem part of the other group for whatever reason.

I think some of it is self-imposed as much as other people impose it. You know you see yourself as being different. But I don't know if it would actually be racism as much as you are seeing yourself as different and so you segregate yourself.

Often, the anticipation that you will be treated unfairly impacts your participation; when you don't feel welcome, it can be easier to give up, even before you start.

Joannie: If they were into sports then were they still excluded from the mainstream sort of sports groups?

Yes they were. There were a lot of friends of mine, they were all very athletic but they just never tried for the mainstream basketball, they never tried out.

Joannie: Why?

My assumption would be they just didn't feel welcomed.

Joannie: Like they didn't fit in?

They didn't fit in, but they were good. Again there is a different culture, different atmosphere in a mainstream school.

Joannie: What makes you feel like you are going to get cut though?

Just by looking at those people there and they think that you are trouble. "Look at Stephen, he will probably do something bad." It pisses me off so I just don't bother with it.

Other times, you couldn't point to one event or situation; rather, it was a feeling that accumulated over time and simply left you feeling discriminated against or confused:

During elementary and junior high I went to a racist school and the teachers were racist. My gym teacher was like that. In high school, ummm, the bunch of teachers I have had have been pretty good.

Joannie: Okay, what makes the teachers racist, like what types of things

would make them a racist teacher? Could you elaborate on that or you know, give me an example maybe.

One slightest little thing you do wrong, they'll get at you. And like when I went through it, at first I didn't think it was nothing but then after awhile I started picking up on it 'cause I noticed he wasn't doing nothing to the non-Native kids, you know what I mean. After a while all the Native kids we just started to see it and that's when we found out. We figured it out.

Even now in gym classes there is a lot of Filipinos and they can do anything. And then when we can do something we get in trouble. Even when we are in the weight room, they will go and see all their friends in the cafeteria ... and if I go and see Remy in the cafeteria, the teachers ask me right away.

Joannie: So you notice the difference in the way you get treated.

Answer: Yes.

Joannie: Do you think you get treated that way because you are Aboriginal? I don't know, I really don't know.

I'm not sure quite how it happened, but eventually, as I watched you in your day-to-day lives at school or in the community, I started to "see" more clearly how this everyday racism was embedded in the messages your teachers conveyed: whether they were conscious of it or not, when their raised voices, crossed arms, or quick dismissals of your excuses for being late (or whatever) are set within a larger context of societal discrimination, racism is present. These observations came into focus after I put on a different pair of glasses with a color-conscious lens. When I started thinking about my own thinking with regard to race, I started to see what you were saying. I could read it in the unfolding of your day-to-day life experiences.

One key lesson I learned from listening to you is that there is little comfort in the contact zone; if we are to make our intercultural interactions with students more affirming, we need to open up critical dialogue about poverty and racism and its effects (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Our university students must be better prepared to work with diverse populations, and administrators need to recruit more Aboriginal youth into physical education degree programs (Champagne, 2006). If we are going to address the racism that permeates our physical education classes, we need to do more than just tell young people from Aboriginal and other under-represented racialized minority backgrounds to become teachers. We need to support them on every step along the way.

A few years after that initial focus group where you first talked about how racism kept you from being involved in phys ed, I bumped into your teacher, the one who encouraged you to talk to me about your experiences. She was very excited to see me and told me how "validating" that study was, simply because you were listened to. I guess I just want you to know that I never stopped listening, and because of what you taught me, I'm no longer asking you why you're not becoming phys ed teachers. The barriers you face are far more obvious to me now. Rather, I'm asking, 'what are we going to do to create more just, equitable learning climates in phys ed'? And, as physical educators, are we willing to give up our comfort zones in order to challenge our own thinking and being in ways that will enable real equity programs to materialize?

Coming full circle: If I hadn't believed it, I wouldn't have seen it

I want to end this letter on a positive note 'cause maybe that's what you've taught me the most. If I've learned anything from you, it's to stay positive. Like the time Leonard and I met for breakfast one morning a few weeks after he had been kicked out of school. It was about two years into that first research study and I was feeling incredibly frustrated by my inability to adequately understand, let alone communicate, the negative experiences that many of you were having in phys ed. Leonard had a lot of time on his hands so I hired him as a youth advisor for my research. As we waited for breakfast, I asked Leonard if he was "angry" at the school for what had happened. Without a hint of bitterness in his voice, he calmly replied, "nah, I really liked that school." His response forced me once again to question the blindspots of my own raised white, middle class cultural perceptions about schools and how they function in the lives of racialized minority youth. Like you, Leonard wanted to be a part of that school, to be involved in phys ed and active after school. He reminded me how we have to work together to help make this happen.

Reading *Research as Ceremony* clarified possibilities for me about how to present the lessons I've learned from working with Aboriginal youth and for this, I am grateful. Shawn's integrated approach to writing about research allowed me to find ways to write a personal story of my own journey as a non-Aboriginal scholar trying to "get it right" in terms of my relationships with Aboriginal youth, their families, communities and teachers. It has taken me a long time to write this story. Whether it was my own personal struggle to resist the colonial racism that so insidiously informs our educational practices and shapes my own thinking, or a fear that as an outsider to Aboriginal culture, I'd never effectively "see" what the young people in my initial studies were telling me, I waited for what might be the right moment to share this work.

As an articulation of my own relational accountability, I am using what you have taught me every day in my work as a teacher educator. Just so you know, we have changed our university curriculum in order to better prepare our mostly white university students to work more effectively with young people from diverse populations. We do this in large part by discussing our shared colonial history and how the development of our own critical social consciences might help us become allies for Aboriginal and other racialized minority youth in phys ed. Over the past five years, our faculty has invested in two key equity programs (i.e., the *Rec and Read Mentor Programs*, see Carpenter & Halas, 2011 and the *Community Recreation and Active Living Diploma*, see Silver, 2011, p. 131) designed to develop the leadership potential of Aboriginal (and other racialized minority) youth within their own communities. Through these programs, I hope that the dominant cultures of whiteness that define our phys ed spaces will begin to shift, thus creating more inclusive learning climates that will benefit all students.

Sorry it's taken me so long to write, and as always, thanks for the advice. I hope you're well and I can't wait to see you in our university phys ed classes. We've been working hard to get ready for you...!

Take care and migwetch.

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¹ Wilson (2008) defines indigenous as being inclusive of all first peoples who share the common experiences of colonialism and understandings of the world, yet are unique in terms of their own cultures. In this article, I use the term “Aboriginal” as a collective term that refers to the original peoples of North America; within Canada, this term is also used to distinguish three distinct peoples, Indian/First Nations, Métis and Inuit (United Way, 2011, p. 51). In choosing to use this term to identify the young people in this article, I want to also acknowledge the diversity of cultures located within First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Within the text, the term “Native” is used when referring to how individuals or groups were identified within the story I share or literature I cite.

² While this type of shift has been underway for some time within specific domains of scientific inquiry (e.g., cultural anthropology, see Clifford & Marcus, 1986; sport sociology, see Richardson, 2000), within the diverse epistemological orientations to physical education research, post-positivistic approaches to research continue to hold significant currency.

³ Mary Louise Pratt (1991) describes the “contact zone” as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 33). While I have found this term to be very useful in my autoethnographic writings about my relationships with Aboriginal youth (e.g., see Halas, 1998), I apply the concept more broadly in this article to also include the interplay of competing positionalities within the culture of physical education, as will be noted further in the discussion.

⁴ In a description of the ‘new Canadian poverty’, Jim Silver (2011) illustrates how the federal government’s fiscal capacity to fund social programs has been purposefully reduced through ideological tax cuts. He describes this new poverty as social exclusion, racialization and spatial concentration that is also associated with inadequate housing, lack of access to necessary social services and high levels of crime and violence (p. 26-28). Winnipeg’s North End, where many Aboriginal families move to when they leave their reserves, is a site of this new Canadian poverty.

⁵ This pathologizing of Aboriginal youth often presents as “crisis” narratives which are produced by the discursive practices set within such fields as education (e.g., Aboriginal youth as drop-outs), health (Aboriginal youth as negative health statistics), criminal justice (Aboriginal youth as gang members), and sport (Aboriginal youth as social deviants in need of positive leisure outlets).

⁶ As Carrington (2008) notes in his critical reflection of his own Black identity amongst a group of working class cricket players, our racialized identities are shaped by many factors that shift how we are viewed by our research participants. In this regard, my ‘North ender’ background/identity often provides me with a form of cultural capital when interacting with young people in Winnipeg’s North End (where much of my research is located), often affording me more privileged insider status in my relationships. As an example of this point, a few years ago, a young man who was attending the adolescent treatment centre/school where I was teaching asked one day, “*Joannie, how many cars did you steal when you were young?*” I laughed as I explained to him that the trouble I got into when I was young was more along the lines of wrapping toilet paper around cars at night, not stealing them. That young man’s query reinforced for

me the salience of North End identity as a cultural marker in my quest to create connections with my students.

⁷ In keeping with Indigenous research ethics, this notion of reciprocity guides my overall research program. Whenever possible, I begin each new research study by creating or supporting opportunities for Aboriginal youth to be physically active.

⁸ In a discussion of the familial affinity of autobiography, autoethnography and reflexivity, Carrington (2008) discusses the complexities of the narration of life stories when the analytical gaze is turned back upon the researcher as a means to problematize subject/object relations in the research process. For this paper, I borrow Carrington's definition of autoethnography as a "reflexive account of the Self" leading to "critical interrogation of the researcher's own biography in relation to those studied" (p. 426).

⁹ That first neighbourhood party was later adopted by Canada 125 as an activity used to celebrate Canada's 125th anniversary of confederation. For a critique of Canada 125 and how events such as the National Neighbourhood Party appropriated notions of cultural pluralism in ways that obscured the on-going hegemony of Canada's dominant culture, see Eva Mackay's (2002) *The House of Difference: Cultural politics and national identity in Canada*.

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