

# Kinesiology's Social Justice Imperative

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Kinesiology is a field focused on physical activity and its impact on health, society, and quality of life. But do all people have equal opportunities to access and experience physical activity? Do physical activity settings allow people to freely express themselves? Are the benefits of physical activity universally shared by all people? If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then these questions demand not only our immediate attention, but also our collective action. During the National Academy of Kinesiology's 90th anniversary meeting, September 22–24, 2021, these questions and others were explored through presentations devoted to the theme “Kinesiology's Social Justice Imperative.” This essay overviews the meeting, its purpose, and the organizers and introduces the 11 thematic papers in the “Proceedings of the National Academy of Kinesiology's 2021 Meeting: Kinesiology's Social Justice Imperative” issue, plus a 12th essay commemorating the National Academy of Kinesiology's 90th anniversary meeting.

**Keywords:** access, diversity, equity, history, inclusion, sport science

Kinesiology is a field<sup>1</sup> focused on physical activity and its impact on health, society, and quality of life. But do *all* people have equal opportunities to access and experience physical activity? Do physical activity settings allow people to freely express themselves? Are the benefits of physical activity universally shared by *all* people? If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then these questions demand not only our immediate attention, but also our collective action. During the National Academy of Kinesiology's 90th anniversary meeting, September 22–24, 2021, these questions and others were explored through presentations devoted to the theme: Kinesiology's Social Justice Imperative.

Having been deferred in 2020 because of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Liu et al., 2020), the 2021 meeting was held virtually. There were several unique benefits to the virtual meeting platform, including allowing more people the opportunity to attend and participate either through an individual or institutional registration,<sup>2</sup> having the 13 live presentations recorded in real time, having an additional 18 prerecorded sessions featuring the work of Fellows inducted in 2019 and 2020 available on-demand (Table 1), and allowing registrants to have ongoing access to all of the recordings.

## Tumultuous Times

Since the meeting's theme was publicly announced on Saturday, September 14, 2019, in Bellevue, Washington, social justice as a national and global construct has been further amplified through the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, in February, March, and May of 2020, respectively.<sup>3</sup> These atrocities and others, which were widely covered by the media, resulted in civil unrest, demonstrations, and protests across the United States. They further revealed multiple intersecting societal issues that have historically plagued the United States and other countries for years (e.g., environmental injustices, exploitation of children and youth, gentrification, LGBTQ+ oppression, poverty, racial inequality, wealth gap/income inequality).

Athletes brought attention to these and other issues through various forms of activism.<sup>4</sup> For example, following the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on August 23, 2020, the Milwaukee Bucks of the National Basketball Association sat out their playoff game against the Orlando Magic (Collier, 2021). As an act of solidarity, other National Basketball Association playoff teams sat out their games, and contests were postponed in other professional sport leagues (e.g., Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, National Hockey League, Women's National Basketball Association). Although unlikely the single catalyst for change, after 87 years, the Washington Football team of the National Football League (NFL) retired its contested and highly controversial name on July 13, 2020 (Waldron, 2020). The NFL also dropped their “race-norming” policy—a policy that had existed for decades—on June 2, 2021 (News at a glance, 2021b). The “race-norming” policy assumed Black players began their NFL playing careers with inferior cognitive skills in comparison with White players, which made it more difficult for Black players to qualify for monetary awards that were claimed to be related to injury-induced cognitive declines (e.g., premature dementia) experienced during their post-NFL years.

Other longstanding symbols of social *in*justice were also beginning to fall throughout society (e.g., Confederate statues were removed, military bases named in honor of Confederate leaders were renamed, the state of Mississippi removed the Confederate symbol from its flag). To disassociate itself from its racist and colonialist past, the American Association of Physical Anthropology changed its name to the American Association of Biological Anthropology (News at a glance, 2021a).<sup>5</sup> Of course, none of these were singular events. Educating, fighting, protesting, sacrificing, supporting, volunteering, and striving to eradicate social injustices are part of the human condition; sadly, resistance to change remains, with some people advocating for more regressive policies and practices (e.g., advancing legislation aimed at blocking the teaching of critical race theory).

Adding to all of this, the lethal and highly contagious severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) resulted in a global pandemic (i.e., COVID-19). Human suffering and social injustices were further exacerbated during this time (Haase, 2020; Maestripieri, 2021).

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**Table 1 Fellows Inducted Into the National Academy of Kinesiology in 2019 (n = 5) and 2020 (n = 13) and Their Presentation Titles**

Induction year	Fellow's name	Active fellow number or international, country	Fellow's presentation title
2019	Panteleimon (Paddy) Ekkekakis	Number 585	"Exercise Hedonics: Implications for Kinesiology's Social Justice Imperative"
2019	Timothy P. Gavin	Number 586	"VasoMyo Crosstalk (VMC) in Health and Disease"
2019	Thomas W. Kaminski	Number 587	"A 36-Year Journey as an Athletic Training Clinician-Researcher"
2019	Duane V. Knudson	Number 588	"Confronting the 'Consensus of Uninformed Dogma' in Higher Education Administration"
2019	Murray G. Phillips	Int'l, Australia	"Empowering Communities: History Making in the 21st Century"
2020	Shawn M. Arent	Number 589	"From the Lab to the Field: Lessons Learned About Optimizing Health and Performance"
2020	Debra A. Bemben	Number 590	"Circulating Factors as Biomarkers of Musculoskeletal Function"
2020	Douglas George Booth	Int'l, Canada	"Sport, Activism, Ethics: Historiographical Perspectives"
2020	Jaqueline D. Goodway	Number 591	"Our Social Justice Imperative: Promoting Physical Literacy in Preschoolers Who Are Disadvantaged"
2020	Chris J. Hass	Number 592	"Applied Neuromechanics: The Art and Science of Mobility"
2020	Jay Hertel	Number 593	"Emphasizing the 'Clinical' in Clinical Biomechanics Research: Sports Injury Rehabilitation"
2020	Jeffrey F. Horowitz	Number 594	"Effects of Exercise on Fatty Acid Metabolism in Obesity: Impact on Insulin Resistance"
2020	Jill A. Kanaley	Number 595	"Does Exercise Timing Matter?"
2020	Yu Liu	Int'l., China	"Advancing Neuromechanical Research to Understand Ergogenic Effects of Neurostimulation on Athletic Performance"
2020	Ann MacPhail	Int'l., Ireland	"Considering and Enacting Capacity Building Across Kinesiology/Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy"
2020	Linda S. Pescatello	Number 596	"Postexercise Hypotension" and "Personalized Exercise Prescription"
2020	Karin Allor Pfeiffer	Number 597	"Promoting Physical Activity in Youth From Underserved Populations: We Have MUCH to Learn"
2020	Kathryn H. Schmitz	Number 598	"Exercise Oncology"

*Note.* In these sessions, the Fellow classes of 2019 and 2020 shared their innovative ideas, perspectives, and insights derived from their respective scholarly and/or professional contributions to Kinesiology. To the extent possible, and while it may not be a direct focus of their work, all were requested to make an effort to acknowledge the conference theme in their talks. As a result, their collective contributions added to the breadth and depth of the 2021 meeting.

When the National Academy of Kinesiology's Program Planning Committee (Table 2) began meeting in the Autumn of 2019 to identify speakers and topics for the originally scheduled 2020 program, we had no idea what a tumultuous time period awaited us. Yet, as a field focused on physical activity and its impact on health, society, and quality of life, we knew the meeting and meeting theme were important and necessary even before the occurrences of the past 2 years. Clearly, the meeting's thematic relevance only increased from December 2019 onward. As but one indicator, the NAK@90 Presidential Committee (Table 2), who worked to promote the meeting and solicit sponsorship, was remarkably successful. Meeting registration was excellent, and each primary session was sponsored.

### Distinguished Speakers

With formal educational preparation in diverse disciplines (e.g., anthropology, education, history, kinesiology, psychology, sociology), and with their work representing diverse areas of specialization (e.g., adapted physical activity, exercise physiology, health disparities, hypertension and vascular health, implementation science, motor behavior, obesity, pedagogy, population genetics,

social psychology, sociology of sport, sport and exercise management, sport and exercise psychology, sport history), the presenters were able to address the meeting's theme from a broad perspective. This is a hallmark of Academy meetings (Hatfield et al., 2020), which typically strive to understand phenomena from the cellular to societal levels.

The speakers on the 2021 program included preeminent academicians, scientists, and scholars from around the world (e.g., Australia, Canada, China, Ireland, United States). Among their many notable achievements, they have served as presidents of at least 16 diverse national and international organizations including the American College of Sports Medicine; American Kinesiology Association; American Society of Biomechanics; Association for Applied Sport Psychology; Division 47, Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology, of the American Psychological Association; International Association for the Study of Obesity; International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity; International Society of Biomechanics in Sport; National Academy of Kinesiology; National Association for Girls and Women in Sport; North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity; North American Society for Sport History; North American Society for Sport Management; National

**Table 2** Members of the Program Advisory Committee and the NAK@90 Presidential Committee

Program advisory committee	NAK@90 presidential committee
Bradley J. Cardinal, Chair, FNAK Number 475, Oregon State University	Ronald F. Zernicke, Chair, FNAK Number 503, University of Michigan
Ketra L. Armstrong, FNAK Number 547, University of Michigan	Douglas J. Casa, FNAK Number 556, University of Connecticut
Dana Brooks, FNAK Number 406, West Virginia University	Kim Graber, FNAK Number 526, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
George B. Cunningham, FNAK Number 558, Texas A&M University	Kevin M. Guskiewicz, FNAK Number 466, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Louis Harrison, Jr., FNAK Number 520, University of Texas, Austin	Mary E. Rudisill, FNAK Number 564, Auburn University
Vikki Krane, FNAK Number 479, Bowling Green State University	Thomas J. Templin, FNAK Number 473, University of Michigan
Mary E. Rudisill, FNAK Number 564, Auburn University	Daniel J. Weeks, International Fellow (FNAK Int'l., Canada), University of Northern British Columbia
Deborah Riebe, FNAK Number 580, University of Rhode Island	Maureen R. Weiss, FNAK Number 360, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
Ronald F. Zernicke, FNAK Number 503, University of Michigan	Nancy I. Williams, FNAK Number 513, Pennsylvania State University
Susan Zieff, FNAK Number 494, San Francisco State University	

Note. FNAK = Fellow National Academy of Kinesiology.

Consortium on Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities; Obesity Society; and the Research Consortium of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Speakers also included editors-in-chief of at least seven journals, including *Athletic Training & Sports Health Care*, *Journal of Athletic Training*, *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *Journal of Student Research in Kinesiology*, *Palaestra*, *Quest*, and *Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal*.

The speakers' work also engaged diverse audiences (e.g., elite sports, physical activity for all), used a multitude of approaches (e.g., conceptual, experimental, observational), and occurred in a range of settings (e.g., clinical, community, educational, laboratory). Boyer's (1996) forms of scholarship—that is, discovery, integration, application, and teaching and learning—were adeptly displayed throughout the meeting.

Many of the presenters challenged those in kinesiology to take action on multiple fronts, supporting Park's (2011) longstanding plea to "put words into action" (p. 383).<sup>6</sup> This idea and others derived from the meeting's theme were reinforced in the Haiku style poems that were submitted before the meeting (Table 3).<sup>7</sup> Some speakers also challenged higher education's reward system and structure (Sugimoto & Larivière, 2018), noting that enduring, genuine, and transformative impact occurs through multiple pathways (Davies et al., 2021).

## Essays on Kinesiology's Social Justice Imperative

Included in this special issue of *Kinesiology Review* are 12 essays, which stemmed from the 13 invited presentations. All but the first essay, "The National Academy of Kinesiology: Its Founding, Focus, and Future," pertains to the meeting's theme. As the Academy's current Historian (2020–), I was commissioned and honored to have the opportunity to write an essay to commemorate the Academy's 90th anniversary.

The 2021 *Rainer and Julie Martens Invited Lecture* was presented by NiCole R. Keith (Fellow National Academy of Kinesiology [FNAK] Number 605). Her lecture, "Taking Steps Toward Health Equity through Physical Activity," was supported

by NAK Pedagogy Fellows in Honor of NAK Fellows Daryl Siedentop (FNAK Number 264) and Lawrence F. Locke (FNAK Number 240).

Moderated by Ira Jacobs (FNAK International, Canada), the next two presenters focused on *Deconstructing the Biology of Social Justice*. Claude Bouchard (FNAK International, Canada) served as the 2021 *C. Lynn Vendien International Lecturer* and discussed "The Human Genome, Physical Activity, Fitness and Health." He was followed by Michael D. Brown (FNAK Number 537), who presented on "Race, Cardiovascular Disease and Vascular Health." Their session was supported by a Consortium of Canadian Universities in Honor of Canadian NAK International Fellows.

In a session collectively focused on *The Body as a Place of Controversy*, Vikki Krane (FNAK Number 479) presented on "Female Testosterone: Contested Terrain," which was followed by George B. Cunningham (FNAK Number 558), who presented on "Transgender Inclusion in Sport." Their session was moderated by Mary E. Rudisill (FNAK Number 564) and supported by Auburn University in honor of NAK Fellows from Auburn University.

Moderated by Deborah Riebe (FNAK Number 580), the next session focused on *Inclusivity in Physical Activity Settings and the Occupation of Space*. Two essays from this session are published in this issue. Martin E. Block (FNAK Number 573) presented on "Examining Inclusion of Individuals With Disabilities in Physical Activity Through a Social Justice Lens," and Paul Rukavina, who is a Fellow in and served as Chair of the Society of Health and Physical Educators America's Research Council during 2021, presented on "Inclusion of Overweight/Obese Individuals in Physical Activity Settings." Sponsorship for this session was obtained from the Big 10 Academic Alliance (née Committee on Institutional Cooperation) in honor of NAK Fellows from Big 10 Universities.

In a session labeled *Agents of Change and Social Activism*, Diane L. Gill (FNAK Number 331) presented on "Kinesiology: Moving Toward Social Justice?" She was followed by Ketra L. Armstrong (FNAK Number 547), who presented on "Teaching to Transgress: Race and a Pedagogy of Empowerment in Kinesiology." Their session was moderated by Maureen M. Smith (FNAK

**Table 3 Haiku-Style Poems Submitted by Academy Fellows**

<b>Bradley J. Cardinal, FNAK Number 475 Oregon State University</b>	<b>Matthew T. Mahar, FNAK Number 521 San Diego State University</b>
Autumn meeting on Together virtually Sharing new ideas	Gulick has vision Jointly make a difference Fellow, pass it on
We meet together “Dwell in possibility” Listen, change, disrupt	Thoughts matter little Words are indispensable Actions matter more
Robbie Park Implored Put our words into action Do it, no regrets	Air feels uncertain A time of struggle, conflict Comfort departed
Haunting history. Head winds cause strain. Inspired! “We shall overcome.”	Equity, justice Leaders cannot be silent Still need to do more
Social justice now Kinesiology act Lead the change we speak	Prepare our students Powerful curriculum Inspired teaching

*Note.* Haiku-style poems were invited prior to the meeting (Cardinal, 2021). The 10 shown here were featured at various points throughout the meeting. In addition, some of the speakers included Haiku-style poems in their presentations.

Number 543) and supported by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in honor NAK Fellows from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Supported by former students, advisees, and faculty colleagues in honor of Professor Elizabeth M. Roberts, University of Wisconsin, on her 101st birthday, James Jianhui Zhang (FNAK Number 545) moderated the final session on the program *Next Steps for Advancing Kinesiology’s Social Justice Imperative and Disrupting the Status Quo*, which was comprised of two presentations by three Academy Fellows. Karen P. DePauw (FNAK Number 379) presented on “Achieving a Socially Just Society: Kinesiology’s Role and Responsibility in Disrupting the Status Quo.” She was followed by a collaborative presentation by Louis Harrison, Jr. (FNAK Number 520), and Samuel R. Hodge (FNAK Number 562) on “Feeling Black: A Conversation About Justice Imperatives in Education, Disability, and Health.”

## Final Comments

As stewards of the field, we are all part of something larger than ourselves with a duty and obligation to “Pass it on.” What we pass on and to whom are important. As an Academy, we must remain steadfastly committed to advancing I.D.E.A.S.—that is, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access, and Social justice.

Toward this end, the authors of the essays in this anthology have sought to raise our collective conscience. They have also challenged us collectively and individually to question the status quo of the field and to—with intentionality—transform human understanding by infusing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion into all that we do. This includes the classic triumvirate of teaching, research, and service, as well as extending into areas, such as advocacy, public engagement, and policy.

Finally, and while tangential to the meeting’s theme, this year also marked the Academy’s 90th anniversary meeting. On this auspicious occasion, an historical essay was developed to inform, inspire affinity, and allow all in attendance to reflect on where we come from, what we are part of, and perhaps help guide where we are going in the future.

## Notes

1. The word “field” is intentionally used here and elsewhere as a unifying concept representing the totality of the discipline and its associated professions (Corbin, 1993).
2. The virtual format also afforded the Executive Committee of the National Academy of Kinesiology the opportunity to partner with the American Kinesiology Association to offer its member institutions a reduced institutional registration rate to attend and participate in the meeting. Nine institutions capitalized on this opportunity.
3. “For courageously recording the murder of George Floyd, a video that spurred protests against police brutality around the world, highlighting the crucial role of citizens in journalists’ quest for truth and justice,” Darnella Frazier, 17 years old at the time, received a “Special Awards and Citations” Pulitzer Prize (2021).
4. Athletes and others have used sports settings, and in some cases their celebrity, to bring attention to social injustices before (Boykoff & Carrington, 2020; Khabbaz, 2021; Whiting, 2021). That said, some sport governing bodies have explicitly sought to limit or prohibit such acts from occurring. For example, the International Olympic Committee’s (2020, p. 90) Rule 50 states, “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.”
5. I strongly encourage readers to review the position statement on race and racism issued by the American Association of Biological Anthropologists (2019). It is cogent and eloquently written. As a primer, here is the Executive Summary:

Race does not provide an accurate representation of human biological variation. It was never accurate in the past, and it remains inaccurate when referencing contemporary human populations. Humans are not divided biologically into distinct continental types or racial genetic clusters. Instead, the Western concept of race must be understood as a classification system that emerged from, and in support of, European colonialism, oppression, and discrimination. It thus does not have its roots in biological reality, but in policies of discrimination. Because of that, over the last five centuries, race has become a social reality that structures societies and how we experience the world. In this regard, race is real, as is racism, and both have real biological consequences.

Humans share the vast majority (99.9%) of our DNA in common. Individuals nevertheless exhibit substantial genetic and phenotypic variability. Genome/environment interactions, local and regional biological changes through time, and genetic exchange among populations have produced the biological diversity we see in humans today. Notably, variants are not distributed across our species in a manner that maps clearly onto socially-recognized racial groups. This is true even for aspects of human variation that we frequently emphasize in discussions of race, such as facial features, skin color, and hair type. No group of people is, or ever has been, biologically homogeneous or “pure.” Furthermore, human populations are not—and never have been—biologically discrete, truly isolated, or fixed. While race does not accurately represent the patterns of human biological diversity, an abundance of scientific research demonstrates that racism, prejudice against someone because of their race, and a belief in the inherent superiority and inferiority of different racial groups, affects our biology, health, and well-being. This means that race, while not a scientifically accurate biological concept, can have important biological consequences because of the effects of racism. The belief in races as a natural aspect of human biology and the institutional and structural inequities (racism) that have emerged in tandem with such beliefs in European colonial contexts are among the most damaging elements in human societies.

6. Roberta J. Park (FNAK Number 261) was elected into the National Academy of Kinesiology in 1979, served as President during 1990–1991, and received the Academy’s highest honor, the Hetherington Award, in 1996 (cf. Vertinsky & Wrynn, 2021).
7. During his tenure as editor of *Quest*, Shirl J. Hoffman (FNAK Number 399 and Hetherington Award recipient in 2015) facilitated the publication of a special issue of the journal devoted to “Poetry and Art in Sport and Movement” (Hoffman, 1989).

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