Decolonizing Sports Sociology is a “Verb not a Noun”: Indigenizing Our Way to Reconciliation and Inclusion in the 21st Century?
Alan Ingham Memorial Lecture

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In this paper, which is a revised and modified version of the 2019 North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Alan Ingham Memorial lecture, the author shares four views, contributions, and opportunities that sports sociologists might consider useful in how to decolonize as well as indigenize our discipline together. The need to actively engage in the theory and practice of how to decolonize while understanding what it also means to work toward becoming an accomplice, activist, ally, or co-resistor are important threads underpinning the nature and scope of this paper. The author concludes with a plea to sports sociologists that decolonizing our minds is as much a collective effort as it is an act of reconciliation while maintaining the promise of inclusion, equity, and human rights. As sports sociologists, understanding what it means to be in “good relations” with Indigenous Peoples is fundamental to how we continue to build on and improve our discipline together.

Indigenous games and pastimes, commonly referred to as sport since the 1300s, have been the lifeblood of Indigenous Peoples and their communities since time immemorial (Best, 1976). Yet, to explain, the origin of amusements or the “arts of pleasure” has remained relatively untapped in our sociological critique, imaginations, and understandings of exploring sport as an act of decolonization (Forsyth & Giles, 2012). Before colonization, such Indigenous games and pastimes existed as tributes to the changing seasons, rites of passage, ceremonial rituals, dispute settlement, as well as, to guaranteed peace and prosperity between tribes with competing nations, and understandings of exploring sport as an act of decolonization (Forsyth & Giles, 2012). Before colonization, such Indigenous games and pastimes existed as tributes to the changing seasons, rites of passage, ceremonial rituals, dispute settlement, as well as, to guaranteed peace and prosperity between tribes with competing interests (Best, 1976; Patterson, 1992; Robinson, 2005; Walker, 1990). Favorite Indigenous games and pastimes, such as lacrosse, canoe racing, swimming, rock climbing, running, and even hunting lasted for days, yet provided a number of important life teachings and learnings that maintained the mana (essence) and mauri (life force) of the tribe from one generation to the next (Best, 1976). Indigenous games and pastimes, however, weren’t just for fun or pleasure; they were also inextricably linked to being in good relations with Earth Mother (Papatiuānuku) and Sky Father (Ranginui)—the land imbued in each member important life skills of living in “kin” relationally and ensured the well-being of the tribe collectively as well as intergenerationally (Cajete, 1994, 2014). As kindred spirits, children were nurtured, cherished, and keenly observed by Elders for their gifts and potential as leaders, knowledge keepers, orators, navigators, hunters, warriors, weavers, carvers, and even gardeners (Patterson, 1992; Robinson, 2005; Shirres, 2000).

Many academics have written (Forsyth & Giles, 2012; King, 2006) about the impact colonization had and continues to have on Indigenous Peoples’ ways of life. In particular, the idea of engaging Indigenous Peoples in sports can be attributed to what many have described as a “civilising agenda” to assimilate Indigenous Peoples to be more like the colonizer, and to prepare the land for mass settlement. Indeed, understanding sport as a “colonizing tool” is not widely accepted in the discourse of sport sociology (Alfred, 2005; Forsyth & Giles, 2012). Fundamentally, incorporating a decolonizing agenda within sports sociology, is not only an attempt to better assess and evaluate how diverse, inclusive, and equitable sports are for Indigenous Peoples; it is also about reclaiming our own ways of knowing, being, and doing as Indigenous Peoples in all areas of society (Smith, 1999, 2012). In other words, we cannot simply cherry-pick indigeneity without critically examining and unpacking colonization. In 2003, a renowned Indigenous Maori scholar—Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith from Aotearoa New Zealand—argued that transforming leadership in the academy is as much an exercise in critical literacy as it is about engaging multiple sites of the struggle—constitutionally, nationally, locally, tribally, publicly, institutionally, and intergenerationally (Smith, 2003, 2014). Moreover, a decolonizing agenda requires a philosophical and political mind shift away from notions of despair, despondency, and deficit theorizing, and toward ideas associated with optimizing the creative potential and capacity Indigenous Peoples possess (wholistically and organically (Bishop, 2005; Royal, 2009; Smith, 2005, Smith, 2014). The theme of the 2019 Conference “Decolonizing Minds, Indigenizing Hearts” for which this paper was written, is about (re)locating ourselves in the work we do with, for, and beside Indigenous Peoples. Professor Linda Tuhiiwai Smith (2013, p. 124) suggested that by employing an ethical “code of conduct” that is grounded in decolonizing theory, and aimed at critiquing our own level of privilege, power, and agency is an important place to begin to understand power imbalances and where power lies, and who holds the balance of power (Barnhardt, 2005; Battiste, 2000, 2013; Bishop, 2005; Pihema, Cram, & Walker, 2002; Smith, 2011, 2014; Smith, 1999, 2005, 2013).

Contextualizing the Indigenous Sporting Phenomenon

Growing up and attending school in a small coastal town in the Eastern Bay of Plenty called Whakatane, in Aotearoa New Zealand...
in the ‘70s and ‘80s, I don’t recall hearing the terms “Indigenous or Aboriginal” being used at school, in the playground, or on the sports fields. I did, however, hear my grandfather use the term “Aborigines” in reference to the Indigenous Peoples of Australia when he returned from visiting my Uncle Keith in Cairns. He would often bring gifts—which, of course, we all enjoyed receiving. One of the gifts I recall my grandfather purchasing for me was a boomerang that I couldn’t wait to try out at the local primary school at the end of our street where we lived. What amazed me was not only how well the boomerang flew in the air but how every time I threw it, it returned to land only a few feet away from where I was standing. At the time, I was none the wiser about the purpose of a boomerang as well as its cultural value to the Indigenous Peoples of Australia—all I knew was how much I loved throwing it—so much in fact that I ended up breaking it, and then spent just as many more hours trying to repair it so that I wouldn’t have to encounter my grandfather’s look of disapproval if he ever found out. Being gifted a boomerang not only spurred my curiosity about Indigenous Peoples in Australia but also inspired me to ask questions about my own identity as a half-caste (half Māori, half Pākehā) growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand. On many fronts, the complexities underpinning the term “Indigenous” or “Aboriginal” remains as contentious as ever, in that, to my knowledge, Indigenous and Aboriginal Peoples never identified themselves as one homogenous group but rather as a series of interconnected and interrelated tribes located relationally within their own distinct dialects (many of whom were multilingual), oral traditions, customs, genealogies, histories, and stories.

The term “Aboriginal,” like the word “Indigenous,” appeared to gain social and global currency in the social reform efforts of the International Labour Organization in the 1950s by Indigenous nongovernmental organizations, such as the Alaskan Federation of Natives, American Indian Movement, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Assembly of First Nations, as a way to achieve solidarity under one collective voice. Today, such terms are present within many constitutional frameworks and government-based policies, programs, and practices (Niezen, 2003). Seemingly, many of us who choose to self-identify as Indigenous often share a similar colonial or postcolonial past or experience, including the loss of land, loss of language(s), abrogation of treaties, and the intergenerational impact of an overly oppressive, and highly politicized civilizing process.

The word “Indigenous” (which comes from the Latin word “Indigenus” or “Indigena” meaning to have sprung from the ground or born in/to a place) refers to peoples who were living on, and with the land before colonization. In Aotearoa, New Zealand Māori make up approximately 15% of the total population (approximately 750 thousand) with one in six Māori choosing to live in Australia (Hamer, 2007; Pringle & Whitinui, 2009). This number is expected to increase to 25% of the population by the year 2050 (Durie, 2003). In the 2016 Census, Indigenous Australians (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders) only make up 3.3% (approximately 787 thousand) of the total population in Australia (Biddle & Markham, 2017), and are expected to grow to 900,000 by 2026 (i.e., 2.2% growth per year) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). In Canada, the Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) make up 4.9% (approximately 1.7 million) of the total population, and are expected to rise incrementally to 7% by the year 2050 (CBC, 2011). In all three countries, over 80% of Indigenous and/or Aboriginal Peoples live in urban areas with 45% of that population between the ages of 15 and 25 years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014; Biddle & Swee, 2012; CBC, 2011; Durie, 2003). In addition, Indigenous Peoples are living longer which should warrant a shift toward anticipating sporting trends that not only increase Indigenous participation (i.e., interest, association, success, engagement, voice, attendance) in sports but also Indigenous Peoples’ quality of life and well-being.

To date, Indigenous Peoples’ levels of participation in sport has been recognized as a growing world-wide phenomenon, so it is important to quantifiy that in terms of why Indigenous Peoples and sports matter. In Canada, for example, the 1971 Native Summer Games that started in Enoch, Alberta drew up to 3,000 participants competing in 13 events; alongside a host of other different cultural events. The North American Indigenous Games is an 8-day event that continues to be held every 3 years, attracting up to 5,000 participants between the ages of 13 and 19 years who participate in 14 different events (NAIG Council Board of Directors, 2019). Such has been the popularity and buy-in of Indigenous sports globally, that in 2015 Palmas, Brazil hosted the inaugural World Indigenous Games with over 2,000 participants from across 30 countries (World Indigenous Games, 2020). One underlying issue in support of such events, however, is that nation-wide reporting of Indigenous Peoples’ levels of physical activity in sports remains under-reported because rural and discrete communities often lack the capability or infrastructure to submit such reports in a timely fashion (Forsyth & Giles, 2012). Predictably a shift toward decolonizing our own minds has resulted in a greater understanding of the social complexities underpinning Indigenous Peoples’ levels of sport participation and therefore, a greater interest in critiquing sports in society has emerged.

Today, many Indigenous activists, knowledge keepers, Elders, scholars and teachers, communities, and family members have challenged the academy to create spaces that seek to increase Indigenous Peoples’ levels of engagement, interest, and success across the disciplines (Bishop, 1998; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2005). In our attempts to do so, it has also uncovered society’s mixed understandings about Indigenous Peoples as reflected within what Smith (2011) contends as “new forms of colonization” (i.e., the neoliberal agenda) that continues to work to homogenize Indigenous Peoples within a “one size fits all” analogy (Bishop, 2005; Smith, 2011). Across the disciplines, however, there exist more of an ethical and moral tension between who should do the work of decolonizing and in particular, what kinds of social theories are likely to decolonize the sporting experience to benefit Indigenous Peoples and their communities. The following four views are, therefore, an attempt to explain what a decolonizing agenda in sports sociology might look like, and indeed, what approaches we might consider useful in how we conduct research alongside Indigenous Peoples.

### View 1: Decolonizing Our Minds Is a “Verb Not a Noun”

The idea of considering decolonizing more as a “verb not a noun” was first introduced to me by Graham Hingangaroa Smith who, as part of the Matariki (Māori New Year) Celebrations hosted by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education in 2007, stated that we (Indigenous students, staff, faculty, and community) need to work harder at “enacting” what we do in postsecondary institutions rather than simply theorizing or conceptualizing about ideas that don’t necessarily translate to transformative action on the ground or in our communities. More recently, Tuck and Yang’s (2012) seminal paper, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” asked that
we work to disrupt and unsettle the dominant narrative that seeks to interpret Indigenous Peoples’ experiences about colonization as simply part of the colonial and settler normalcy, and its future (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Seemingly, both points of view not only ask us to examine our own ethical responsibilities, positionality, and criticality when engaging in decolonizing work, but also to consider how opportunities to transform are enacted—socially, politically, and economically.

As I learn more about my own Indigenous language, Māori, and similarly about the Indigenous languages of the Pacific and the Americas, I realized that Indigenous languages are built upon “verbs not nouns.” Many polysynthetic languages among First Nations Peoples in Canada and Aborigines of Australia are composed of morphemes (the smallest pairing of meaning to any given set of sounds) that often start with a verb. For example, the Native American Mohawk word tuntu:ssu-qatar-ni-ksaite-ngqiggi-uq literally translates as “He had not yet said again that he was going to hunt reindeer” begins with the verb tuntu:ssu—reindeer hunt (Polysynthetic language, 2020). Similarly, from an Indigenous Māori language perspective, our language consists primarily of a verb-subject-object word order and makes extensive use of grammatical particles to indicate categories related to tense, mood, aspect, case, and topicalization, among others (Māori language, 2020). Similarly, “Me haere au ki te pati—I am going to a party” or “E rere ana au ki te marama—I am flying to the moon.” What I am attempting to highlight here is that many Indigenous Peoples not only lived an active lifestyle, they also relied on communicating what seasonally needed to be done to live in kin with nature, and being in good relations with each other based on the natural lore/laws of the universe. This way of living also ensured a tribe’s survival and legacy would remain intact for generations to come.

Calls to Indigenize the academy in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and Canada have been a cultural legacy catchcry since the 1970s (Archibald, Smith, Lee-Morgan, & De Santolo, 2019; Battiste, 2000; Simon & Smith, 2001; Smith, 1992; Smith, 1996; Walker, 1983, 1990). However, in the United States, it was not until the Economic and Social Council authorized the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to establish a working group on Indigenous population under the United Nations in 1982 that Indigenous Peoples’ issues related to addressing inequalities and racism would become more visible (Merlan, 2009; Sanders, 1989). In the 1980s, many Indigenous Māori scholars in Aotearoa New Zealand universities recalled the experience of feeling isolated, ostracized, marginalized, devalued, and in need of institutional support when seeking to address blatant acts of racism (Walker, 1990). As bell hooks (1990) wrote “… this space of radical openness is a margin—a profound edge locating oneself there is difficult, yet necessary. It’s not always a safe space. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance” (p. 149). For many, engaging in decolonizing work and addressing racism head-on has been a lifetime commitment to working to increase Indigenous content, curriculum, programs, graduates, teachers, and leaders (Smith, 2000, 2014; Smith, 2013; Whitiniu, 2013; Whitiniu, Glover, & Hikuroa, 2013; Whitiniu et al., 2015). Moreover, the struggle to create spaces within sport sociology that is genuinely valued and supported by universities remains an ongoing challenge and requires what Smith (2014) refers to as “a mind-set that is transformative, self-determining and empowering” (para. 4).

Linda Tuhiiwai Smith’s (2011) opening keynote for the Kei Tua o te Pae Hui: The Challenges of Kaupapa Māori Research in the 21st Century at Pipitea Marae Wellington, New Zealand entitled: *Storying the Development of Kaupapa Māori—A Review of Sorts*, argued that “Kaupapa Māori didn’t just come out of a nowhere space, it came out of a particular struggle to legitimize our identity, and that iwi Māori want to do things that reflect who we are, and not what others perceive about us” (p. 11). Indeed, the struggle to reclaim and revitalize the Indigenous Māori language in the 1970s became both the catalyst and reality for what is commonly referred to as the Māori renaissance period (Smith, 2011). In addition, the act of decolonizing schooling and education in Aotearoa New Zealand was very much a strategic endeavor, as it was a relational endeavor—including lots of cups of tea, plenty of hui (gatherings/meetings), and discussions within community. Such enduring and engaging relationships were also at the forefront of our right as Indigenous Peoples to protest when over 5,000 people, carrying 60,000 signatures, marched to Parliament in 1975 demanding that “not one more acre of land be lost to the government” (King, 1992; Walker, 1990). The 1,100 km march led by an 80-year old kuia (Elder) Dame Whina Cooper from the top of the North Island to the Parliament grounds in Wellington mobilized a nation to not only learn about the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi, but for all New Zealanders to learn how to honor what the Treaty of Waitangi means constitutionally as well as socially. The 1975 Land March also successfully steered the government into opening the first kōhanga reo (total immersion) early childhood center in Waiwhetu, Lower Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand in 1982. As Indigenous Peoples (tangata whenua—people of the land) of Aotearoa New Zealand, the historical march and protest sent a strong message to all New Zealanders that Māori education and schooling is as much a human and Indigenous right as it is a civil right. In 1975, the Waitangi Tribunal was established to oversee and mediate the long list of grievances committed against the Māori people since 1840 (King, 1992; Orange, 1987, 2004). One of the outcomes from this process resulted in the Māori language becoming an official language in 1987. This recognition not only ignited the revitalization of the Māori language, it also created the space for conversations on how we as a nation need to work together in mutually beneficial ways. As Professor Higgins (2019) explained, “we have gone from protest to parade in a generation where we as a country celebrate these historical struggles in a respectful and understanding manner” (para. 1). The agreed upon Treaty of Waitangi principles of partnership, protection, partnership and peace at times, requires a level of activism (protest) to hold our Treaty partners (i.e., the government) accountable to what was promised, and this continues today in various contexts.

Moana Jackson, a renowned Indigenous Māori constitutional lawyer highlighted that, “the Indigenous Māori experience of consultation sometimes resembles—consult, insult and assault … yet the Treaty never talks about consultation” (McDonald, 2018, para. 12). What Jackson was referring to is that iwi Māori (as the rightful Treaty partner) don’t consult, they negotiate, and reach an agreement—consultation Jackson contends, is seen as the wrong place to start the conversation because whoever initiates the consultation process is often in the position of power to dictate the terms, criteria, and standard for engagement. Furthermore, constitutional jurisdiction for Indigenous Peoples does not ask successive governments for their permission, but rather, it challenges and educates governments to understand where they have failed to uphold their part in the relationship with Indigenous Peoples. Similarly, and in a number of scholarly and courageous conversations, Linda Tuhiiwai Smith has consistently argued, that the struggle for legitimacy as
Indigenous Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1980s was more about being on the front lines of the protest movements and working to hold the government accountable for dishonoring our Treaty rights. From this position, the work of decolonizing is most definitely a “verb,” and not a noun because to do nothing in the face of ongoing levels of injustice is simply not an option for many iwi Māori living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Therefore, including Indigenous worldviews, values (axiology), epistemologies, methodologies, theories, and ways of knowing requires that we as sports sociologists come to know how our own research (im)positions impact Indigenous Peoples in all areas of society (Bishop, 2005). This is not to say that many non-Indigenous sport sociologists are not already doing such work, but there is a need to create a common ground that encourages decolonizing dialog that speaks truth to power and promotes work plans that addresses ongoing levels of inequality and inequity. Today, there are numerous examples where disciplines, such as anthropology, archaeology, health, education, environmental, law, psychology, astronomy, and even environmental sciences are working to decolonize their disciplines, and to be more inclusive of Indigenous People’s ways of knowing, being, and doing—however, and as some Indigenous scholars may well suggest, institutions also need to invest the same level of time, effort, and commitment to demonstrating how they are working to decolonize as well as increase the numbers of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The question, therefore remains, how do we collectively go about doing this work together? Do we make a start and hope people jump on the waka (canoe) and embrace the kaupapa (plan)? Or do we need to work on decolonizing how we think first, before Indigenize? Or can we do both simultaneously?

The Director of the University of British Columbia Institute Aboriginal Health, Dr. Lee Brown (2016), argued that inspiring people to think differently, often requires one to engage in an emotional experience that first challenges previously held norms, beliefs, stereotypes, stigmas, and attitudes (Brown, 2016). For myself, and other Indigenous scholars working in my field(s) (education, health, and sociology), decolonizing and Indigenizing our discipline feels very much like a “back to the future endeavor.” In that, there is a genuine need to learn more about Indigenous history, heritage, and homelands, while at the same time it is also deeply necessary to critique what I refer to as the “colonial impasse,” where sport as a civilizing process often seeks to reaffirm the “master’s house and tools for building the house” to maintain the status quo (Lorde, 2018). Unpacking and critiquing the “master’s house and tools for building the house” is perhaps key to decolonizing our minds and to allowing other ways of knowing to emerge.

View 2: Addressing Indigenous Silencing and Invisibility in Sociology of Sport Research

In Audre Lorde’s speech entitled: The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action delivered at the Lesbian and Literature panel of the Chicago’s Modern Languages Association (December 28, 1977), Lorde wrote:

I was going to die, sooner or later, whether or not I had even spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you. ... What are the words you do not yet have? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own need for language.

The idea of decolonizing sports sociology takes time to reflect on what we choose to make visible (social constructed norms) at the expense of making others invisible (those on the margins of existing social norms) and second, to question our own research (im)positions that either misrepresent, misuse, or subtly exclude Indigenous voices within the discipline of sports sociology. Furthermore, it is a sociological imperative that we hear more about how Indigenous Peoples themselves experience the sporting phenomena in regards to new forms of colonization (aka neoliberalism) and how Indigenous Peoples are being excluded in sporting contexts. Such neoliberal tensions specific to equity (the illusion of a level playing field), democracy (serving the dominant interests), individualism (possessive and competitive individual), choice (often within defined parameters or boundaries), globalization (the illusion of sharing wealth), devolution (the illusion of power sharing), accountability (mechanism for surveillance), and privatization (for the public good) and the ways in which the social–cultural elements concerning Indigenous Peoples either oppress or marginalize Indigenous Peoples through economic–political exploitation (Smith, 2002) are constant threats to indigeneity. More specifically, how might incorporating a decolonizing theory and methods in sports sociology address issues related to oppression, assimilation, marginalization, alienation, vulnerability, resilience, self-determination, and those at-risk? Similarly, what ethical processes (code of conduct) can we now include in the way we research Indigenous Peoples’ sporting experiences in respectful, relevant, and meaningful ways (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 1994; Forsyth, 2020; Forsyth & Giles, 2012; Sasakamoose, Bellegarde, Sutherland, Pete, & McKay-McNabb, 2017)? A key strategy adopted by a leading Indigenous Māori scholar, Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1997) is to “remove the colonizer from the centre of our consciousness” so our minds are free to act with greater purpose and vision.

View 3: Sport as a Decolonizing Act of Resistance, Solidarity, and Unity

In the International Journal of the History of Sport, Professor Eric D. Anderson’s (2006) article entitled: “Using the master’s tools: Resisting colonization through colonial sports” describes how the Navajo People negotiate sport and argues that although the Navajo have fully embraced colonial sports (i.e., basketball and baseball) as part of their culture, they have not necessarily adopted the meanings associated with those sports, such as, the individualism that supports a win-at-all-costs mentality, but rather, as the opportunity to compete in team sports that resist Euro-American neoliberal ideals. Anderson (2006) emphasizes the point that occasionally beating “White” teams at their own game is one-way colonial sports can be used as a form of resistance against the ongoing oppression imposed by colonial culture. Unfortunately, however, standout Indigenous athletes can find themselves caught between a sport that promotes superstardom and a culture that rejects it; a social location that is difficult for youth Indigenous athletes to navigate (Anderson, 2006). In this study, Navajo athletes saw sports more as recreation and entertainment as well as a way to bring people together and to unite who they are as Navajo People. In this instance, Anderson (2006) highlights how Navajo used sport as an opportunity to resist colonization; self-determine; and build a stronger sense of identity, purpose, vision, and community with each other. By decolonizing the sociological binaries that exist between race, culture, identity, and gender, difference also pushes back on the “them and us” narrative to focus more on ways sport (re)connects Indigenous Peoples to the land, builds pride, self-
worth, and a sense of belonging about being Navajo. Sporting initiatives that seek to promote reconciliation must also seek to include ways for Indigenous Peoples to have greater control over what sport means for Indigenous Peoples, and how decisions in sport influences Indigenous Peoples’ access to land, language(s), governance, nationhood, and identity (Forsyth, 2020). The idea of determining what constitutes sporting success as Indigenous Peoples in a community is something many of my own Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduate students have spent considerable time exploring—the discussions have spoken to the power of how Indigenous Peoples see sport as a resistance mechanism to strengthen personal and family relationships, regenerate cultural teachings and practices, and to unify community—socially, culturally, economically, as well as politically.

**View 4: Decolonizing Sport Sociology Is as Much Personal as It Is Political**

Sir Professor Mason Durie (2003), a trained clinical psychologist and recently retired Indigenous Māori academic based in Aotearoa New Zealand stated: “You don’t say, How do I adapt this approach to Indigenous Peoples (Māori)? Rather, you start from the premise, What’s important to Indigenous Peoples (Māori) and build round it” (p. 77).

The understanding that research, by its very nature, can alienate many Indigenous Peoples away from their communities, thereby perpetuating the same colonizing structures many of us seek to resist, requires Indigenous scholars as well as non-Indigenous scholars to question what it means to conduct ethically informed Indigenous research. In this instance, we also have the opportunity to build a supportive international interdisciplinary network of scholars, who are open to the idea of including a decolonizing theory in collaboration with other more conventional research methods. Building trusting and respectful relationships while understanding each other’s roles and responsibilities as collaborators and partners within the project is key to building research agendas that are more authentically collaborative (Berryman, SooHoo, & Nevin, 2013). Dr. Kuni Jenkins (a Ngāti Porou Māori scholar) argued, however, that as Indigenous Māori, we are not quite ready for all our ways of knowing to be bought and sold in the academy—yet interestingly enough, we see many instances where adapting Indigenous ideas both commercially and/or for research purposes without any recognition or acknowledgment coming back to Indigenous Peoples themselves continues at an alarming rate of knots (Smith, 2012). The point I want to make here is that to consider using a decolonizing approach without any understanding of what constitutes Indigenous activism, socially–historically–politically, or what underpins the Indigenous struggle or meanings associated with being an activist would be a mistake, to begin with. Indeed, a decolonizing approach is not for everyone, and similar to feminist or other social theories, we need to be well informed about using the right tool for the job, or risk framing our work in a discourse that is less likely to represent those we seek to understand or explore. Moreover, applying a decolonizing agenda is as deeply personal and cultural, as it is political. The fact that I took the time to introduce myself in my own language is very much a decolonizing approach—even though I am not a fluent speaker of my language, I understand that a key strategy underpinned by colonization was to dehumanize as well as kill off our language, culture, and identity, so it’s very important for me to acknowledge we survived, and are working to reclaim and reconstitute who we are as Indigenous Peoples from a more humane perspective (King, 1992; Walker, 1990). Furthermore, acknowledging the people of this land as well as those who have passed on is intended to assert that as Indigenous Peoples, our legacy is inextricably linked to our ancestors and that we should never forget the impact colonization had and continues to have on us as First Peoples and our ways of life. Derrida (1972/1981) suggested:

> There is no clear window into inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why. No single method can grasp the subtle variations of ongoing human experience. (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 12)

Moreover, the search for grand narratives have been replaced by local, small–scale theories fitted to specific problems, contexts, and situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 11). For Indigenous Peoples, the inherent socio–political–historical struggles that have emanated over the past 180 years due to the colonization—directly or indirectly, will differ significantly in terms of one’s own social–economic status, life choices, privilege, capability, and opportunities—positively or negatively. What is different, however, is how we might think about those experiences and in particular, how our own stories, narratives, and experience can work toward building stronger and more resilient Indigenous communities. The idea of living in despair, based on our past, is something Indigenous Peoples can certainly relate to; however, Indigenous Peoples would argue that we are consistently negotiating and constructing ourselves within the struggle, while at the same time, looking to create alternative pathways that reshape our future more positively. The sociopolitical work of building self and community is also part of the decolonizing process to self–determine what we can control and how we make decisions collectively.

**Applying a Decolonizing Approach in Sports Sociology—Four Contributions**

Over the past 20 years, researching Indigenous Peoples in sports sociology has benefited mainly non-Indigenous sports sociologists. Creating a new reality of what we don’t know about Indigenous Peoples in sports is another key aim underpinning a decolonizing approach. For example, research about Indigenous Peoples in sports has often centered around race, racism, discrimination, social injustices, alienation, oppression, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, etc. Very little attention, however, has been given to reclaiming and reimagining how Indigenous Peoples’ experience, understand, resist, or contest sports from a decolonial position. In many instances, colonization is often referred to in the past tense, or as something that happened to Indigenous Peoples that everyone needs to fix. In this section, I want to provide four contributions a decolonizing approach can make to the field of sports sociology and in particular, to provide examples of how collectively we can do this work together in a good way.

**Contribution 1: Reframing How Indigenous Peoples Share Their Experiences in Sport**

Between 1998 and 2001, and as part of my Master’s work, I was first introduced to the idea of autoethnography by my supervisor...
Dr. Clive Pope, and graduate lecturers, Dr. Jim Denison and Dr. Pirkko Markula based at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand—all of whom encouraged me to consider my personal relationship between sport, culture, and identity growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand as an Indigenous Māori male adolescent. Reading Arthur Bochner, Carolyn Ellis, and Laurel Richardson’s work on the use of narrative inquiry alongside approaches to doing autoethnography by my supervisors, as well as taking a course with Dr. Russell Bishop on Kaupapa Māori (decolonizing theories and methods), captured my thinking about how social theories not only complement each other but also speak more powerfully and critically to those on the margins of society. Moreover, being able to align ideas associated with Kaupapa Māori using autoethnography to frame my Master’s dissertation entitled: Growing Up Māori: My Search for Identity in the Sporting Experience provided the impetus to reflect more on the four Ps—people, passion, pain, and purpose, not only as a way to tell my story but also to socially and culturally examine how sport effectively masked my Māori identity growing up. In 2013, inspired by the work I completed for my Masters, I published an article in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnicity entitled: “Indigenous autoethnography: Exploring, engaging and experience ‘Self’ as a Native method of inquiry” (Whitinui, 2013). The article sought to challenge the preconceived ideas and conventional ways of writing autoethnography as well as to reposition Indigenous autoethnographic writing as a resistance-based discourse informed by acts of self-determination, transformation, and decolonization (Whitinui, 2014). The key points underpinning this paper include the following:

- Who am I and where am I from? (location)
- How well do I know myself as being an Indigenous person? (my connection to my identity as an Indigenous Māori person)
- What do I believe in as an Indigenous person? What are my main beliefs around what it means to be Indigenous?
- What pains me, or lifts my spirits as an Indigenous person? What are my main beliefs around what it means to be Indigenous?

By restoring the way Indigenous Peoples do research, we are actively reclaiming how we want to be represented in this space. For example, how do Indigenous Peoples enjoy, experience, achieve, negotiate, navigate, and/or understand sporting success as Indigenous Peoples? What we hope will transpire is how we then (re)interpret or give meaning to what Indigenous Peoples see as self-determining and transformative in sports and similarly, in other disciplines. In reading, Derrick Drakeford’s book entitled Finding Your Purpose in 15 Minutes, the author suggests that situating ourselves within loss, struggle, pain, trauma, and grief is not only a motivating factor of how to write, it can also inspire us to find our purpose for why we write, and to write from our own lived experience (Drakeford, 2010). Affording space for including Indigenous voices across disciplines has become a catchcry for doing decolonizing in multiple sites in society—including sporting contexts.

### Contribution 2: Reinterpret How Indigenous Peoples Give Meaning to Sport

Applying a decolonizing theory or approach suggests ways Indigenous Peoples seek to interpret or reinterpret their sporting experiences (Forsyth, 2020; Forsyth & Giles, 2012; Milne, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Moreover, how do Indigenous Peoples give meaning to sports that help them to reclaim their identity, ways of knowing, and provide alternatives to the more dominant ideologies that seek to maintain the status quo? Reinterpreting the meanings Indigenous Peoples give to sport seeks to examine a range of different possibilities, opportunities, and outcomes based on who is telling the story and what stories are being told, privileged, or silenced. Denzin’s (2014) book entitled Interpretative Autoethnography suggests that autoethnography is a resistant narrative that can function as performances to highlight injustices, inequities, inequalities, and unjust practices. However, a decolonizing approach or theory takes this approach a step further, in that it also includes a postinterpretative framework referred to as a “material reality” that is often not present in many conventional and/or dominant interpretations (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). In essence, what Jones and Jenkins (2008) argue is not what people say or contest is right or wrong concerning our version of history, but more to the point of what the voices of those least represented in the history books actually say happened. Similarly, Jones and Jenkins (2008) are deeply curious about how language of the “material” might therefore differ epistemologically, and what effect this has on the language of interpretation, and therefore how the subject(s) are described and articulated? Finding the truth or indeed legitimating a more authentic version of one’s story, they suggest, is also a key ethical premise underpinning this materialization.
approach that resonates strongly with a decolonizing theory or approach.

Jones and Jenkins (2008) therefore seek to ask what happened on the day missionaries first arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how the missionaries’ version of history differs from the oral account given by iwi Māori. The British report that this was the very first sermon that took place in Aotearoa New Zealand, while iwi Māori argue that no such sermon took place in that it was more a sham fight or an informal gathering of two races coming together for the first time. Very similar to saying Captain James Cook discovered the Māori of New Zealand—when in actual fact, we were never discovered we were already here! Effectively, the meta-story of colonization recedes, and increasingly a meta-story of struggle, resistance, and survival emerges constructing a new reality that considers Indigenous accounts as one of “territorial validity” we can use to reclaim and reframe history (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 140). From this perspective, what kinds of Indigenous sporting stories can be reinterpreted? What “new reality” can emerge from the retelling of stories Indigenous Peoples tell about themselves? Indeed, the opportunity to rediscover and reinterpret how sport fosters positive human relationships can equally be explored with, by, and alongside Indigenous Peoples using this postinterpretative framework. As Marie Battiste (2015) reminds us: “Nothing about us; without us” (p. 1) is an ethical consideration for how to do research that is ethically grounded in what Indigenous Peoples determine as being relevant, beneficial, and useful (Battiste, 2015). Battiste (2015) also suggests that we now have the tools whereby every single discipline has the potential for including decolonizing forms of research, while at the same time, developing a new generation of Indigenous scholars. Seeking, reinterpreting and rediscovering new truths about Indigenous lived experiences are both transformative and liberating and provide the opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to build, transform, and heal.

**Contribution 3: Rediscovering How Sport Influences and Transforms Indigenous Peoples’ Lives**

We see examples of sport influencing and transforming Indigenous Peoples’ lives all the time. One such example highlights Alex Nelson as an Indigenous MusgamagwxDzawada’enuxw First Nations from Kincome Inlet, who was recently inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame in 2018. Aside from his long-standing service, leadership, and achievements as player and advocate for Indigenous soccer for over 40 years, Alex also talks about how soccer helped him to cope with the 7 years he spent at residential school in Alert Bay and later on how his continuation in soccer helped him to move beyond the residential school experience. This leads us into our fourth and final contribution.

**Contribution 4: Reimagine Sport as a Social–Cultural Site for Decolonizing and Transforming Our Lived Realities in Communities**

Reimagining sport as a social–cultural site for decolonizing and transforming the structural and systemic impediments impacting Indigenous Peoples and their community’s engagement with/in sports asks some fundamental questions about who should be doing this work and why? In 2013, at the Kei Tua o Te Pae Hui: Challenges of Kaupapa Māori Research in the 21st Century conference based at Pipitea Marae, Wellington, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013) keynote shared five key code of ethical questions:

(a) What is the question about?
(b) Why is it important?
(c) Does it deserve to be answered?
(d) If it’s to be answered, what does it mean for whom?
(e) Who will ultimately benefit from this research?

These ethical questions sit at the intersection of activism and radicalism whereby a decolonizing theory (way of thinking) emerged out of our own unique historical struggle that fought to protect our rights as Indigenous Peoples to our lands, languages, landscapes, and ways of life. In addition, activism and radicalism are grounded in mobilizing Indigenous Peoples out of a passive, psychological, political, and inactive depressed state and towards the idea of self-governance. Alternatively, applying a decolonizing theory asks people to not only honor their treaty, constitutional, or legislative relationships with Indigenous Peoples but also asks non-Indigenous Peoples to share power, and more specifically, decision-making power. Arguing for the inclusion of a decolonizing theory to coexist alongside other social theories, we consider of importance within and across the discipline of sports sociology is also part and parcel of raising the level of critical and cultural consciousness about a host of wider systemic and structural issues that impact the lives of Indigenous Peoples and their communities (Fanon, Philcox, Bhabha, & Sartre, 2007; Smith, 2013). In 1997, Graham Hingangaroa Smith outlined the following six principles that ask Indigenous Peoples to move away from being mere recipients of conventional schooling and education, and toward becoming more critical of what schooling and education looks like as Indigenous Māori. The following principles are just as relevant today and include:

- **Tino Rangatiratanga**—The principle of self-determination or relative autonomy;
- **Taonga Tuku Iho**—The principle of validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity;
- **Ako Māori**—The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy;
- **Kia Orite**—The principle of mediating socioeconomic and home difficulties;
- **Whānau**—The principle of incorporating cultural structure which emphasizes the collective rather than the individual, such as the notion of extended family;
- **Kaupapa**—The principle of shared and collective vision/philosophy.

These principles remain a constant tension between mono-intercross–multicultural ideologies specific to addressing levels of ongoing Indigenous Māori students’ underachievement in schools and education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Moreover, Graham Smith’s (2014) keynote entitled: Transforming Research: The
Emerging Indigenous Research Context in Aotearoa New Zealand argued that Indigenous research is “transformative not descriptive.” Underpinning this call to action, G.H. Smith posited the following seven key research strategies of how we can do this work together:

(a) Aboriginal and Indigenous research is about sharing some ideas as an invitation and exploring what is possible, not what we do that others should adopt;

(b) Aboriginal and Indigenous research is relational, in that we have similarities, yet our struggles are often located within quite different socio–historical–political contexts, so we need to be mindful and respectful by providing a model for how to do this work, but it is not the model; we can provide a response to the colonization, but it is not the response;

(c) Aboriginal and Indigenous transformative research is about what works, and comes with an emphasis on applied and practical research processes and outcomes;

(d) Aboriginal and Indigenous is about considering alternatives that may be different ways of knowing, yet work, and applying these elements to make a real difference;

(e) Aboriginal and Indigenous renewal is a decolonizing approach that seeks to create incremental victories within and outside of the academy; because we understand that as Indigenous Peoples, we were never meant to win the academic struggle but rather we were meant to contribute to critiquing the struggle across disciplines;

(f) Aboriginal and Indigenous impact is just as important as developing outcomes. In other words, we are able to create evaluation models using decolonial approaches to test the impact of what we seek to change over time—socially and politically;

(g) Aboriginal and Indigenous rearticulation of cultural values and customs are different and here is why:

Aboriginal and Indigenous becoming critically literate helps us to accurately understand what’s going wrong and why. The key is to understand structuralist and culturalist impediments; for example, how is the economy situated in ways that disadvantages or excludes Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples from reaching their potential within society;

Neoliberal tensions and policies pertaining to equity, democracy, individualism, devolution, choice, globalization, and privatization continue to undermine Indigenous self-determination efforts and seek to transfer control of the economy away from the public sector to the private sector and, in doing so, abrogate government responsibility.

Such calls to action provide a blueprint of how we can critique new forms of colonization that socially exclude Indigenous Peoples from maintaining their tribal and sovereign rights to land, language, ceremonies, education, well-being, and health (Battiste, 2015; Smith, 1997, 2014; Smith, 2012). Following on from here, what are some examples where decolonizing theory and practice are working to reclaim, revitalize, and renew our purpose as Indigenous Peoples across disciplines? In particular, how does employing a decolonizing approach support Truth and Reconciliation: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), treaties, UNDRIP, that are inclusive and aimed at reconciling our differences?

Opportunities to Do This Work Together

We don’t have to look far to see where using a decolonizing theory has a transformational impact in addressing the far-reaching impacts of colonization across the globe. Although ideas specific to applying a decolonial theory in sports sociology is relatively new, this doesn’t preclude many who are and continue to work with Indigenous Peoples in this space. As a way of bringing together the ideas and examples shared in this paper, the following decolonizing theory is proposed that could also be adopted in the study of sports in society. Moreover, it is my belief that a decolonizing theory sits at the intersection of critical theory and feminist theory; and is by its very nature, a Native resistance-based approach for addressing ongoing levels of colonization. Indeed, imperialism, colonialism, anti-colonialism, and unsettling Whiteness will always frame the nature and scope of what constitutes a decolonial approach. Here are four opportunities that I would like to offer as a way forward in how we can collectively work toward decolonizing sports sociology.

Opportunity 1: Adopting a Decolonizing Theory in the Study of Sports in Society

At the 2019 NASSS conference, Jay Coakley’s workshop call to upgrade his seminal text Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies as an “Indigenous ally” presents perhaps a timely opportunity to consider the tenants underpinning a (post)decolonial theory, in concert with other theories associated with race, ethnicity, identity, and culture (Coakley, Cooky, & Wachs, 2019). Given the 2019 conference theme: Decolonizing Minds; Indigenizing Hearts, sports sociologists have a unique opportunity to come together to create the first of its kind edited book on Decolonizing Sports in Society. The following proposal draws inspiration from Jay Coakley and Peter Donnelly’s text, Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies, not to replicate what has already been before, but more so, to consider Indigenous insights, reflections, experiences, and learnings about closing the gap between what we don’t know and to widen our thinking to include the following:

(a) Assumptions about the basis for Indigenous social order in society—Social order is based primarily on the kinship values, customary practices, treaty relations, experiences, and interests of Indigenous Peoples and their communities. Social life is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing and the meanings Indigenous Peoples give to their social reality;

(b) Major concerns in the study of Indigenous societies—How are meanings, identities, and culture underpinned by Indigenous ways of knowing? How do Indigenous Peoples define issues, challenges, conflicts, and solutions to ongoing forms of colonization?

(c) Major concerns in the study of Indigenous sports—How is colonization reproduced and or resisted in and through sports? What are the strategies for resisting, self-determining, and transforming sports, and the sporting experience as Indigenous Peoples?

(d) Major conclusions about Indigenous sport–society relationships—Sports are cultural sites that repress, oppress, alienate or exclude, and/or empower Indigenous Peoples. Sports are sites that reinforce colonial power through neoliberal, racist, and culturally unsafe ideologies, policies, and practices;

(e) Indigenous social action and policy implications—Use sports as sites to challenge, resist, and transform exploitative, racist, and oppressive forms of colonization. Increase the inclusion and cultural safety of sport participation and opportunities with and by Indigenous Peoples. Transform
sports to included Indigenous voices, partnerships, perspectives, approaches, insights, reflections, experiences, and learnings.

(f) **Major weaknesses**—Indigenous and decolonizing approaches don’t necessarily provide guidelines to assess the effectiveness of particular forms of resistance as strategies for making progressive changes in social worlds. Indigenous and decolonizing approaches can at times use confusing vocabularies (socially-historically-politically) making it difficult to merge critical Indigenous ideas and theories. Indigenous theories about decolonization can vary depending on the social and cultural contexts and experiences underpinning colonization.

Kim Anderson, a well-cited Indigenous Metis professor based at the University of Guelph alongside Robert Innes edited book *Indigenous Men and Masculinities—Legacies, Identities and Regeneration*, has spent considerable time exploring the meaning of Indigenous masculinities and what it means to be an Indigenous man, further examining thecolonial disruption and imposition of White patriarchy on Indigenous men (Innes et al., 2015). The book includes a number of theoretical, discursive, and research-based understandings about how Indigenous men live their lives as men. In her 2019 keynote at the American Men’s Studies Association Conference hosted by Brandon University, in Manitoba, Canada, Kim Anderson spoke about the lack of attention given to Indigenous men’s issues specific to race, gender, as well as LGBTQ2S, and that if we don’t shine a light on the issues Indigenous men are experiencing, addressing the ongoing issues Indigenous women have fought for and faced for decades are likely to continue (Anderson, 2019). As an Indigenous feminist, recognizing that continuing to critique patriarchy without understanding the views of Indigenous men themselves created an even bigger gap in this work because Indigenous men were often silent with/in the debate (Anderson, 2019). In the same edited book, Borell’s chapter entitled: “Patriotic games: Boundaries and masculinity in New Zealand sport” used a (de)colonial approach to unpack ideas associated with masculinity, nationalism, and patriotism (Borell, 2015). More specifically, the chapter unpacked the decision by an Indigenous Māori player, James Tamou, to play for the National Australian rugby league team, and not his home of birth, New Zealand. The level of controversy and media backlash James Tamou received was critiqued as unfair, unjust, and unwarranted. As illustrated, James Tamou was simply bucking the rather possessive colonial ideology that suggest as an Indigenous Māori rugby league player you owe it to yourself, your family, your tribe, and to the nation to play for your home country. Dr. Brendan Hokowhitu’s (an Indigenous Māori scholar) earlier work critiquing colonial ideas associated with the “noble savage” in a seminal paper entitled, “Tackling Māori masculinity: A colonial genealogy of savagery and sport” provided the context and impetus for Borell’s critique (Hokowhitu, 2004). The opportunities afforded to critiquing Indigenous men, masculinities, and sport over the past 15 years has certainly blossomed, and with the widening interest in Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour in sports such scholarly work will continue to grow. The second opportunity speaks to the need for a decolonial theory to be added to the existing social theories within sports in society scholarship.

**Opportunity 2: Employing a Decolonizing Sport in Sociology Project**

To my knowledge, there is no comprehensive body of work that brings together all issues and/or controversies associated with the imposition of colonial sporting subjectivities, bodies, identities, practices, politics, agency, and experiences within and across a number of sporting institutions. In an age of postcolonialism, neocolonialism, resurgence, and inclusion, we have yet to provide a renewed Indigenous interrogation of the new forms of colonization and its impact on Indigenous Peoples in sport. Based on this article, contributing a text on decolonizing methods in sport and physical activity could add to the conversation and become part of what we currently teach in sports in society. The objective of the proposed book, therefore, is to draw attention to how Indigenous people’s understandings and experiences about sports are framed, shape, critiqued, and even contextualized across a range of social institutions including media, education, health, government, religion, and even the economy. As such the book aims to advocate for, and introduce, new critical voices and perspectives through which to understand ways to decolonize, self-determine, and transform the dominant sporting ideologies we have become accustomed to critiquing. It will also bring to the forefront how far Indigenous Peoples in sport have come and are willing to go to protect their way of life despite the sporting ruling relations, social norms, values, beliefs, and ideals attributed to what sport is or isn’t. I envisage the book proposal being structured into the following sections, each comprising of at least three to four chapters:

(a) **Decolonizing sport and physical culture**: What is it and why study it?

(b) **Applying decolonizing methods to sport and physical culture**: How can this help us to study sport and physical culture more inclusively as well as critically?

(c) **The study of Indigenous Peoples in sport and physical cultural contexts**: How can sport and physical cultural contexts be more inclusive of Indigenous Peoples and their ways of knowing?

(d) **Sports, physical culture, Indigenous Peoples, and socialization**: What does it mean for Indigenous Peoples and their communities to fully participate in sport and physical cultural contexts as Indigenous Peoples?

(e) **Sports, and Indigenous children and adolescents**: What do Indigenous children and adolescents say about sports and physical cultural contexts and how it supports their language, culture, and identity growing up?

(f) **Indigenous masculinities and men in sports and physical culture**: How are Indigenous men (mis)represented within sporting and physical cultural contexts?

(g) **Sports, physical culture, Indigenous Peoples, and the media**: How are Indigenous Peoples (mis)represented in the media?

(h) **Sports, physical culture, Indigenous Peoples, and treaties**: How can treaties be honored to support Indigenous Peoples’ rights to sport and physical cultural practices?

(i) **Sports, physical culture, Indigenous Peoples, and neoliberalism**: What are the new forms of colonization that continue to impact Indigenous Peoples’ rights to accessing sports and physical cultural practices?

(j) **Sports, physical culture, Indigenous Peoples, and self-determination**: How are Indigenous Peoples reclaiming and reimagining what sports and physical cultural practices looks like as Indigenous Peoples?

(k) **Sport, physical culture, Indigenous Peoples, and leadership**: What kinds of Indigenous leadership practices are helping to increase participation levels in sport and physical cultural contexts?
(l) **Sports, physical culture, Indigenous Peoples, and the future:** What are some of the challenges and/or opportunities Indigenous Peoples need to navigate and/or negotiate into the future? How can Indigenous Peoples be better prepared to anticipate the changes in sporting and physical cultural contexts now, and into the future?

Rather, than see this as a “wish list” of what a book about decolonizing sport and physical culture should or could look like, I would rather it act as a starting point for a conversation about why Indigenous decolonizing theories pertaining to sports and physical culture are necessary, and how such a text could contribute socially, historically, politically, economically, and even philosophically to what we know or don’t know. Smith (2012) reminds us that:

Intrinsic to Kaupapa Māori (decolonizing theories or approaches) is an analysis of existing power structures and societal inequalities. Kaupapa Māori (decolonizing) theory therefore aligns with critical theory in an act of exposing underlying assumptions that serve to conceal the power relations that exist within society and the ways in which dominant groups (ourselves included) construct concepts of “common sense” and “facts” to provide ad hoc justification for the maintenance of inequalities and the continued oppression of Māori (Indigenous) people(s). (p. 188)

I would hasten to add, however, that including and applying Indigenous definitions, concepts, methods, and experiences not only seeks to critique where power lies and who are the dominant groups; they also seek to resist oppression, unpick overt racism, include marginalized groups, and disrupt socially constructed binaries associated with race, culture, identity, and difference to be more transformative and more self-determining—terms that are perhaps not so easily located, defined, or explained within existing sociological sporting texts. The third opportunity, I want to highlight briefly is how becoming a “good relative” not only disrupts binaries related to race, culture, identity, and difference; it also sees human relationships as the cornerstone to achieving equity, inclusion, and just practices in physical activity, sport, fitness, and a healthy lifestyle.

**Opportunity 3: We Are All Kin—How to Be a Good Relative!**

In the opening of one of our cultural safety research team meetings at the University of Victoria, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Dr. Skip Dick, a Songhees Elder said, “To be in good relations with each other, requires us to be kind, and encouraging towards each other—because we are all kin” (personal communication, 2019). Skip’s opening remark not only had a profound impact on the work we were about to embark on; it also helped to guide how we should do the work together, and in a good way. Martin Tolich’s (2002) critique of “Pākehā (White) paralysis” described that the lack of time, effort, and energy afforded by the dominant Pākehā group to support minority (Indigenous) groups’ aspirations and needs is often strategic in a way to exclude Indigenous Māori perspectives being included within and across society (Tolich, 2002). Alternatively, Robin DiAngelo’s (2018) book on White Fragility reinforced the point that speaking directly to White power and privilege can help to frame the acts of engagement; and by doing so we can critique this in terms of what this means relationally (individual vs. collective) as well as politically (as key decision makers) in different contexts. A key premise underpinning this relationship, is that, if White people can name, disrupt, and dismantle their own levels of Whiteness, they are perhaps in a better position to take greater responsibility for how they (and others like them) need to change (DiAngelo, 2018). One caveat, however, is that we need to ensure White people are not continuing to use their power and privilege to benefit from Indigenous Peoples’ struggle as those coming from a high to save us, but rather seen as working alongside us to change the institutional and systemic pillars that reinforce the ongoing power imbalance. The final opportunity explores the importance of becoming an accomplice and how that contributes to achieving a decolonizing agenda

**Opportunity 4: Becoming an Accomplice for Social Change in Sports Sociology**

The idea of becoming an accomplice in what a sustainable decolonizing agenda in sport sociology might look like is perhaps the most important idea underpinning this paper. In personal communication with Linda Tuhuiwi Smith at the 2018 Biennial Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Indigenous Research and Development Conference held at The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand, the idea of non-Indigenous Peoples calling themselves an “ally” had been oversimplified based on the premise that everyone who doesn’t identify as an Indigenous person was now proclaiming themselves an “ally.” Linda instead preferred the term “accomplice” because it evoked the idea that if one was willing to stand on the front lines of the struggle with Indigenous Peoples shoulder to shoulder, they needed to be prepared to go to prison fighting for Indigenous. Being an accomplice also means learning to become an activist “with” and “beside” Indigenous Peoples in the struggle in a variety of different contexts. Similar ideas shared by Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz (2018) in the article, “Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for the indigenizing the Canadian academy” argued that people in the academy are often cherry-picking or co-opting ideas about inclusion, reconciliation, and indigeneity that simply end up reaffirming the same dominant values and perspectives Indigenous Peoples actively seek to dismantle (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Working toward becoming an accomplice within our discipline and the academy, therefore requires an understanding of how we all play an active part in reaffirming acts of colonization and therefore what we must actively do to dismantle it. The following strategies are not new but are important extensions of a lot of hard work currently taking place by many Indigenous Peoples, scholars, communities, Elders, organizations, tribal colleges, and knowledge keepers to decolonize disciplines as well as ourselves in the spaces we work, live, and play and include:

(a) Moving from “fixing” the Indigenous problem or Indigenous Peoples to building and maintaining quality relationships with Indigenous Peoples in community;

(b) Moving from researching “about and for” Indigenous Peoples to implementing decolonizing theories “with and by” Indigenous Peoples to actively deconstruct, dismantle, and/or disrupt colonial (mis)perceptions;

(c) Moving from a preoccupation with deficit theorizing related to culture-based binaries, categories, and subjectivities (i.e., race, ethnicity, etc.) and toward a focus on participatory, blended, inclusive, and strength-based approaches associated with influencing the conditions for social change that effectively address social disparities impacting the lives of Indigenous Peoples and their communities;
(d) Moving from legislation that “contradicts” Indigenous rights and resurgence efforts and toward legislation that “endorses” Indigenous rights and resurgence efforts;

(e) Moving from conventional models of sport that seek “buy-in” from Indigenous Peoples as often passive partners or recipients of sports and toward creating converging models of sport that are self-determining, self-governing, and self-sustaining;

(f) Moving from past Indigenous struggles, grief, loss, and pain and toward future opportunities and capabilities that Indigenous Peoples in sports can envision themselves thriving and flourishing with/in;

(g) Moving from decolonization as a noun to actualizing a decolonizing agenda that is much more self-determining, transformative, and that can be shared and realized collectively; and

(h) Moving from merely focusing on addressing the disadvantages concerning Indigenous Peoples and toward unleashing the creative potential for social change.

In our personal and professional capability, and as sports sociologists, we will inevitably encounter challenges associated with decolonizing and Indigenizing our discipline. If we agree, however, to do the work of an accomplice by addressing institutional and systemic racism, colonization (masked today as neoliberalism), as well as White supremacy, we will go some way to creating the mindset Indigenous Peoples have been working to change for decades (Swiftwolfe, 2018). Finally, by encouraging a decolonizing critique, sport sociologists can play a major part in (re)constituting, (re)framing, (re)claiming, and (re)constructing knowledge that is mutually respectful of Indigenous ways of knowing that is critically transformative.

**Conclusion**

This paper is not intended to solve all the complexities and/or problems we might find ourselves grappling with in terms of how we might choose to navigate or negotiate decolonizing and Indigenizing sports sociology. This work however does speak to how Indigenizing our way to reconciliation and inclusion can be achieved if we are prepared to decolonize our minds as an active and critical process. Similarly, Forsyth and Giles (2012), who edited a book entitled: *Aboriginal Peoples & Sport in Canada*, suggest that this book sort to “engage in more [respectful] dialogue, see [unchartered] possibilities, value alternatives and be willing to work towards creating something new [perhaps transformative]” (p. 232). My hope is that by collectively and collaboratively choosing to include decolonizing practices, we can become more confident and capable to tackle some of the wider systemic and structural impediments that continue to impact negatively on Indigenous Peoples and their sporting experience(s) and indeed, how we continue to study various sporting contexts. The following whataatauki (Māori proverb) also speaks to transforming ourselves in the work we do. In this regard, the discipline of sports sociology is represented as helping a bird to fly and considered a powerful vehicle for social and cultural change if done with a good heart, and in a good way.

Ma te huruhuru, ka rere te manu; Me whakahoki mai te mana ki te whānau, hapū, īwi.

Adorn the bird with feathers so it can fly; and return the mana (essence, prestige) to us all.

Of course, everyone’s journey of decolonizing their mind needs to be contextualized within where we work, live, and play—so, I wish you well with your next decolonizing project(s).

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