Lessons From Critical Race Theory: Outdoor Experiential Education and Whiteness in Kinesiology

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Abstract
Background: Outdoor experiential education (OEE) is often presented as a neutral and equitable curricular practice with positive learning outcomes. However, few studies have examined the experiences of racialized and queer White settler students or the representation of Whiteness in OEE curricular documents. Purpose: This article explores Whiteness, racialization, and Indigenous erasure in OEE as an undergraduate curricular practice at a Kinesiology program in a Canadian university. Methodology/Approach: Using critical race theory, a critical discourse analysis of six types of documents used to advertise and organize the outdoor experiential courses was combined with five semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students. Findings/Conclusions: This study demonstrates that students must negotiate Whiteness and settler colonialism to participate in OEE. Three main findings include the following: (a) The imagined student is wealthy and White, (b) students both assimilate to and resist codes of Whiteness, and (c) curricular documents and practices promote Eurocentricity and erase Indigeneity. Implications: OEE presents an opportunity for students preparing to become workers and educators in sport and recreation to learn about Whiteness, racialization, and Indigeneity. Kinesiology program design can use student narratives to shift from supposedly neutral curricular documents and pedagogies to ones that expose and work toward dismantling Eurocentricity.

Keywords
outdoor education, Whiteness, Kinesiology, settler colonialism, critical race theory

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Outdoor experiential education (OEE), or outdoor adventure education, is a participatory pedagogy with recreation activities in a wildland setting at the core of the learning experience (Warren, 2005). Although a growing body of research indicates that OEE has historically been taught with a Eurocentric orientation, by and for White people (Mullins et al., 2016; Newbery, 2012), the particular way OEE functions as a tool for the perpetuation of settler colonialism and racial exclusion, particularly through university education, has not been widely documented. Examining the university setting is particularly important because OEE students may go on to be highly influential educators, coaches, or trainers related to outdoor sport, recreation, and land-based education.

In this article, we critically examine racialization and Whiteness in student experiences and institutional discourses related to a series of Outdoor Education Courses (OECs) delivered through a Kinesiology program at a Canadian university. As these OECs take place on Indigenous lands that have been appropriated by generations of colonial settlers, but are described as promoting equity, we believe that the “hidden curriculum” deserves exploration. The investigation involved a mixed-method approach, including critical discourse analysis (CDA) of six types of documents used to advertise and organize the outdoor courses, combined with five semi-structured interviews with four racialized and one White undergraduate student.

The analysis of documents and interviews reveals three themes: (a) the imagined Kinesiology student is wealthy, White, and already familiar with outdoor recreation; (b) the practices of assimilation and resistance students employ are strategies used to cope with and navigate Whiteness and heteronormativity; and (c) the maintenance of Eurocentric and settler epistemologies is not challenged. Indeed, the results demonstrate that OEE remains a tool of Eurocentric post-secondary education systems, specifically within the discipline of Kinesiology, with the result that some students must negotiate Whiteness and settler colonialism to participate in these mandatory courses. That OEE is organized in Kinesiology, a field that claims interdisciplinarity but often focuses on biomedical, objective understandings of movement and the body, is not incidental for this study. The structures within which OEE is organized influence the curriculum, pedagogy, and student experience. Before we clarify the research methods and findings, we review the underlying critical and anti-colonial research in the field of OEE.

Review of Literature

The majority of the OEE literature reflects the experiences of the dominant actors in outdoor landscapes: White, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual men (Kivel et al., 2009). As a subset of critical race theory, Frankenberg (1993) provides a framework, “whiteness,” to examine the systemic privileges and unquestioned central, and seemingly neutral, position of White people in outdoor recreation, outdoor education, and in Canadian society as a whole. Yet, only recently have researchers attempted to move toward applying anti-oppression and anti-racism theoretical frameworks to critically examine the ways in which Whiteness and White hegemony are perpetuated and
reproduced in the context of outdoor recreation (Kivel et al., 2009; Laurendeau, 2020) and outdoor education (McLean, 2013; Mullins et al., 2016; Newbery, 2012; Warren et al., 2019).

An investigation into how Whiteness shapes the physical and sociocultural spaces of outdoor recreation in Canada shows it is embedded in settler colonialism, a system based on the Eurocentric conceptualization of North American nature and wilderness as *terra nullius* (new land). The perception of land as empty, and therefore able to be conquered and declared as property, led to historical and persistent policies, practices, and conceptualizations that do not recognize, or demonstrate concern for, Indigenous lives, ways of life, or connections to the land (Hudson-Rodd, 1998). Rather than *terra nullius*, the land where OEE has operated has always been contested space (i.e., in terms of treaties, land use, wealth extraction, labor of stolen peoples, internment of migrant communities, or displacement of Indigenous peoples). Kivel et al. (2009) urge scholars to understand “how institutions construct and perpetuate . . . hegemonies of whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality (as found in and through leisure contexts) [and] contribute to discourses of ‘othering’” (p. 489). In addition, Vander Kloet (2010) suggests that wilderness is pivotal to a (White) Canadian national identity and has been used to demarcate those imagined within and outside of the nation. Given this history, important institutions to examine are universities and their participation in the ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands to meet OEE learning outcomes.

By laying the Canadian context of settler colonialism bare, Mullins et al. (2016) have problematized the role of Whiteness in OEE pedagogy, which is shaped by “Western colonial understandings of Indigenous people and the environment” (p. 50) and positions “land as space to be conquered, occupied and visited, but not inhabited” (p. 51). McLean (2013) conducted a critical analysis of the reflections of students who had participated in an OEE program and found that a settler narrative of White benevolence and innocence with respect to Canada’s history of colonial violence supports “erasure of aboriginality” (p. 360). Absenting Indigenous histories and ways of knowing from curricula was also found by Newbery (2012) and Warren et al. (2019), thus creating a hidden curriculum that centers White and male privilege. This approach to OEE inherently marginalizes the experiences of White women, non-heteronormative men, and racialized people of all genders, including North American Indigenous groups. Consequently, Rose and Paisley (2012) encourage fellow instructors to “co-construct, along with students and participants” new approaches to OEE curriculum and pedagogy that explore the “potential of experiential education to address issues of privilege and oppression” (p. 150).

In Canadian universities, OEE is often taught in Kinesiology programs, which were found by Douglas and Halas (2013) to feature pervasive Whiteness in research, curricula, cultures, and in the professoriate because educators “did not have the expertise, ‘time’ (in the curriculum) or confidence to talk about issues pertaining to race and diversity” (p. 468). Douglas and Halas (2013) conclude that Canadian Kinesiology programs allow systemic racism to be reproduced through silence, invisibility, and exclusion, and suggest their “outward disregard for the consequences of the hegemony of Whites, cultures of whiteness and the absence of racial diversity, is deeply
troubling” (p. 471). There is a pressing need, then, for research that situates OEE within the deeply troubling contexts of Kinesiology in Canada. To fill this gap, we engaged in an analysis of Kinesiology institutional discourses and student experiences of OECs.

**Context and Method**

The ethical protocol included approval from the university under study because this research involved analyzing current documents and interviews with current students. The approval was obtained on January 15, 2020. As such, participant names and exact titles and page numbers of documents are not referenced to protect the anonymity of the participants, program, and university. Only publicly available documents were examined.

**OEC Context**

A 4-year, undergraduate degree, urban Kinesiology program in Ontario, Canada, requires students to complete a total of three mandatory OECs consisting of 3 days/ nights each. Each OEC is an ungraded “completion” credit needed for graduation. For each course, 230 to 250 students, 23 to 27 upper-year student-counselors, and three to eight faculty and staff typically meet at their urban university campus for the 2- to 3-hr coach ride to the rural, northern Ontario camp locations. These are situated in the traditional territories of the Ojibway, Chippewa, Huron/Wendat, Mohawk, Potawatomi, and Métis Nation of Ontario, as well as the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people.¹ The camps have various facilities such as a lakefront and river for water sports; areas for ropes courses, tennis courts, and playing fields; and buildings including a gymnasium, dining hall, canteen, and sleeping cabins. The camps are used as recreational, summer and overnight camps at other times of the year.

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

The techniques of CDA are informed by the theoretical framework of Fairclough (1992), which portrays “the functioning of language in political and ideological processes” (p. 26), especially as revealed through the “intertextuality” of discourse, or the discursive relationships shared between texts. As there is “no one prescribed method, singular ‘best’ approach to CDA” (McGannon, 2016, p. 230), we shaped our analysis of OEE texts using McGannon’s (2016) three central tenets. The first tenet “prioritizes the process and outcome of language” more than the content, because discourse drives action (p. 231, emphasis in original). The second tenet claims that self-identity is “the product of individual, social and cultural discourses” (p. 232), so we attempted to understand how discourses interact to shape and produce “subject positions” through language. The third tenet claims that “when certain discourses and social and institutional practices are more prevalent and dominant [. . .], some identities are subverted or marginalized” (McGannon, 2016, p. 233). We attempted to identify the dominant
discourses in the context of OEE as well as how racism, Whiteness, and colonialism construct social identities and behavioral practices.

**Selection of documents for CDA.** We chose a total of six types of documents because they were publicly available on the Kinesiology program’s website, addressed to all (potential) undergraduate students, and contain important granular program and OEC details, with an explicit expectation that students will read them carefully. The documents included the program website, the 2019 to 2020 undergraduate booklet, the Kinesiology timetable including course descriptions, the OEC registration kits, the OEC information and equipment lists, and the welcome guide for first-year students. Only the portions of the documents pertaining to OECs were considered for CDA. The form or the production of the text, including emphasis and repetition, also served as a basis for analysis to understand why and how OECs operate.

**Interviews**

Individual, semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the OEE experiences of undergraduates because they invite “participant(s) to tell stories, accounts, reports and/or descriptions about their perspectives, insights, experiences, feelings, emotions and/or behaviors in relation to the research” (Smith & Sparkes, 2016, p. 103). They included demographic and open-ended questions. Although the questions were informed by critical race theory, we asked them in a neutral manner to encourage diversity in narratives and a broader range of raw data. Questions included the following: Could you share with me a couple of examples of the types of activities that you participated in during the program? What are some key takeaways or learned components that you acquired through this experience? What kind of feelings do you remember from your first impression of the program and the instructors’ leadership of the program?

To mitigate perceived power differentials, the interviews were conducted by a racialized student with no position of influence over the participants and every participant was reminded of their opportunity to withdraw at any time and to review their interview transcripts. Viviane Soa Gauthier (V.S.G.) was a Kinesiology student at the time, close in age to the participants, of White French Canadian and Black Malagasy descent, and experienced in OECs, though she had never been an OEC student-counselor. Janelle Joseph (J.J.), a Caribbean/Black cis-woman Assistant Professor, and Caroline Fusco (C.F.), an Irish/White cis-queer woman Associate Professor, also engaged in reviewing the interview transcripts, and in the writing and analysis of the manuscript, but had no contact with interview participants.

**Recruitment and participants.** To gather interview participants, we used convenience and snowball sampling techniques. We posted a research recruitment flyer in the Kinesiology student lounge and sent a group email to undergraduate students who had previously indicated interest in being contacted for research studies in the Kinesiology program. These sampling techniques aimed to recruit participants with as wide a variety
of experiences and demographics as possible. In addition, V.S.G. shared their contact information with interviewees and encouraged them to share it with others. After recruitment, we followed university ethical protocols by sending an information letter and consent form to all potential participants for review and signing. Five participants were selected because they were undergraduate students who had participated in at least two OECs, completed at least 2 undergraduate academic years, and were 18 years or older. The five participants each reflected different intersecting axes of power and knowledge that shaped their experiences. Two participants had recently completed courses related to sociology of race and settler colonialism. Four identified as belonging to a racialized group, four held Canadian citizenship either by birthright or immigration, and one was an international student. The participants belonged to socioeconomic backgrounds ranging from low to middle-high, and three had experience as both an OEC student and OEC student-counselor. This was significant because student-counselors were encouraged to contribute to the curricular design of the OECs. Self-reported interview participant identity characteristics are included below to help contextualize the quotes provided.

Data collection and analysis. Interviews lasted for 60 to 90 min. All participants had opportunities to debrief with V.S.G. for at least 15 min at the end of the interview to discuss the project and, if needed, additional resources pertaining to student mental health support. Interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis using Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) technique, which includes retrieving quotes with “references to a particular concept, theme, [or] event” (p. 224) across different interviews; searching “for patterns and linkages between the concepts and themes” (p. 224); and “[w]eighing and combining [quotations to] synthesize different versions of the same event” (p. 227). Interview themes were integrated with CDA themes to understand the experiences of OEC participants relative to the implicit and explicit discourses available in institutional documents.

Results

The Imagined Kinesiology Student

The documents reproduced discourses representing an imagined student demographic that is White, wealthy, and familiar with outdoor recreation settings. The assumption of the students’ financial status was immediately apparent in the clothing and equipment list found in the Course Registration Kits. These included costly summer items such as quick drying long pants; lightweight hiking boots; a waterproof rain jacket and pants; a specific “Darcon II, Polarguard, goose down or Quallowill” summer sleeping bag; and “Teva” sandals. The winter list included even more pricey items, such as a wind-resistant jacket shell and pants, gaiters or snow cuffs, and costly insulated sleeping equipment that “is important for sleeping out in snow shelter . . . SLEEP BAG [sic] IS MANDATORY!!!” (OEC Information and Equipment Lists, emphasis in original). If purchased new, the items could cost over Can$1,500 and the Course Registration Kits included a reminder that “specialized and ‘high end’ items are best purchased at stores . . . including Mountain Equipment Coop” (MEC).
Although some items were listed as mandatory, no purchasing alternatives were offered for students who do not own the listed requirements or who may not be financially capable of making such expensive purchases. Stores mentioned in the documents such as MEC have been positively regarded because the high prices of clothing and equipment reflect their commitment to manufacturing in Canada, paying fair wages, and contributing to environmental sustainability. However, they have also been critiqued for reproducing ideologies of consumption by supposedly innocent, eco-conscious, respectable, White, ruling class men (Higham et al., 2019; Vander Kloet, 2010). An examination of 20 years of MEC catalogs by Vander Kloet (2009) revealed the company’s “invitation to shop for wilderness... [represented] as a pristine and empty space... ensure[d] that certain national myths are kept intact. Securing a claim to innocence and respectability for MEC members” (p. 246). The Course Registration Kits cannot be seen as neutral when they specifically mention MEC. The activities promoted through the store, and through Kinesiology, are imbricated with the ways “Indigenous nations were violently evicted or coercively displaced from... ‘wild’ landscapes enclosed within park borders” (Youdelis et al., 2020, p. 233), in part, to generate ideas about “civilized” and “modern life” (Mackey, 2002). The clothing and equipment listed plays a part in producing wilderness as something to be consumed by tourists, as well as producing humans as deserving of natural playgrounds—adventurers who are separate from wilderness (Laurendeau, 2020; Vander Kloet, 2010), but, “[t]hey too, can see themselves as living in harmony with the land” (Mackey, 2002, p. 80), keeping warm and dry.

All four OEC Course Registration Kits also included language that represents an imagined student body that is familiar with outdoor recreation activities and camping. For example, the Code of Conduct section of the OEC Course Information and Equipment Lists suggests that students be “appropriately dressed for each activity... [and] for the northern wilderness.” The discourse of “appropriate” dress without explanation assumes that students are, and should be, familiar with how to dress at camp and, furthermore, connotes a culturally standardized, singular definition of “appropriate.” Imagining and centering this student who is familiar with wilderness as a recreation space, who can afford “high end” shopping, and who aligns with the historically imagined Canadian outdoor enthusiast contradict the professed program mission: “to create a safe and inclusive environment for every student” (Course Information and Equipment Lists).

Related to this notion of the imagined Canadian wilderness enthusiast, a third assumption about students that emerged was the ability to assimilate into the dominant White culture. Racialized students’ descriptions of the social interactions between students and mainly White student-counselors and the structural organization of the OEC content revealed that they all encountered moments where they felt unheard or unsupported by the camp’s administration.

Sharon, a Chinese/East Asian cis-woman, experienced push-back from student-counselors when she said that she did not feel comfortable participating in the swim test because of her period. Malala, an Indian/South Asian cis-woman, met criticism when she requested exemption from the swim test due to psychological and physical
safety: “I was telling her like, ‘hey I don’t feel comfortable doing the swim test. I know I can’t swim. . . . Can I just say I can’t swim and then not do it if I’m being honest?’” The answer was “No.” Malala failed the swim test, coughing and gasping for air, and from that point remained uncomfortable both in the outdoor education space and in relation to student-counselors more broadly. Water activities also induced fear, anxiety, and feelings of discomfort for Haile, a Somali/Black, cis-man, who could not swim. Ethnic or racial minorities who have lower rates of swimming competency due to reduced access to lakes and pools (Golob et al., 2013) may not readily enjoy water activities. It was obvious the imagined student was one who was comfortable with, and competent in, swimming and water activities that are integral to camp experiences.

Aïcha, who identifies as a Muslim, Indian/South Asian, cis-woman, was disappointed that halal food was not offered as had been explicitly promised, and also found herself negotiating the tensions between her cultural and religious values and those that were embodied through one activity:

I’m really competitive so I really wanted to win, but I had to be piggy-backed . . . for me because of like culture, religion kind of mixed together that was like a weird thing . . . to have to be so close to someone, and . . . especially like a guy, but I cared more about winning [laughs], so I was like “you know what? It’s fine.” But it was like a really awkward thing.

Although Aïcha was able to process these uncomfortable tensions and complete the activity, which involved wrapping her legs around a man she had not previously met, her experiences reflect the OEC student-counselors and administrators’ assumptions about activities and a lack of consideration of (a) the values and beliefs of non-Western cultures and (b) the needs of those who may be uncomfortable with the dominant culture at camp and who require culturally sensitive, alternative options. By design, the OECs are not neutral; they imagine (and reproduce) a particular student subject, and the learning outcomes demand assimilation to a dominant norm. The coding of the equipment shopping and recreational activities as White (Laurendeau, 2020; Vander Kloet, 2010) and part of a national Canadian identity (Mackey, 2002) are made invisible. However, students outside this dominant position do not simply accept their marginalization.

The Practices of Assimilation and Resistance

All five participants perceived White students and student-counselors as overrepresented compared with their broader urban environments; they all also reflected on the degrees of assimilation, resistance, and code-switching in which they engaged because of this. In the context of the OECs, most of the participants considered switching the way they expressed themselves when surrounded by staff and students from a White or heteronormative background. Sam, a queer (non-binary) Italian/White student, reflected on their first impressions of the OEC:
I think subconsciously I had the experiences in high school kinda come back and up, like hey “you gotta kind of have to pass as straight again,” “you gotta pretend” because you’re in a new environment with new people and they’re all guys who seem to be straight.

The gendered cabin arrangement, hypermasculine gender performance of some student-counselors, and lack of representation of queer symbolism led Sam to believe that they would be pressured to “pass as straight” and that people “on the spectrum of sexuality” were not welcome. Sam’s narrative is reflective of the reality that racialized discursive practices and power relations have sustained White heterosexuality through physical activity (Fusco, 2014). Therefore, the Whiteness of the camp also includes a heteronormative agenda.

Haile, who identifies as a Somali/Black cis-man, reflected on his feelings as he first stepped out of the coach and into the camp. A complex set of racial and cultural tensions shaped his perception of the sociocultural space and he instantly found himself negotiating his own identity relative to the perceived dominant culture.

I, right off the bat, knew that I stood out as an outlier, or somebody who was different. [. . .] I felt very anxious and I felt uncomfortable to act how I normally act . . . I felt like I had to, you know, talk differently . . . I felt like I had to censor or suppress my true identity . . . I had to assimilate into the kind of culture because I knew that if I, I truly did feel that if I was to act like I normally act, um, then I would lose that professional gain.

Haile talked “differently,” and would “censor” or “suppress” his behavior and identity to fit in to a setting dominated by White students and student-counselors. Haile’s experiences confirm what Payne and Suddler (2014) found in their investigation of the experiences of Black students in predominantly White, post-secondary institutions in the United States—that Black students adopted codes of Whiteness to survive.

Sharon’s initial reactions to the sociocultural environment of the OECs also reflected considerations of whether or not to assimilate to the camp’s culture. Sharon attended the OEC only weeks after she arrived from an East-Asian country, where she had lived all her life. As an international student, she shared how she first struggled with the desire to make friends: “I wanted to integrate, I wanted to match with the culture. I wanted to do what people, [pause] other people do.” However, a year later, she experienced the OEC as a student-counselor with a “shift in attitude,” better able to manage the social dynamics of the pressures to assimilate and opportunities to be independent at the camp:

But right now, as a counsellor I just kind of let it go. Like, I don’t have to force myself to do it if I don’t feel like doing it. It’s a lot easier on me . . . [I] don’t have to conform with the kind of atmosphere there.

Although she attempted to assimilate, acting in a way to “match with the culture” as a first-year student, Sharon’s ability to “let it go” in second year reflects how some
racialized students might both accommodate and embody resistance to the norms of the camp culture at different times.

A particular memory for Malala, an Indian/South Asian student, was the experience of being around the fire pit at the beginning of the OEC.

The second we got off the [coaches], you go to this thing and you sit down, and all the counsellors come out and they introduce themselves and . . . I still remember my first thought was . . . “Every single one of these counsellors is White. I am not going to have a good time because I already know that none of these counsellors even have the ability to know or have the same experiences that I’ve experienced. . . . they’re not going to understand anything I’m going through.”

The lack of racialized student-counselors ultimately contributed to the perceived (and real) White dominance of the OEC culture.

It is within the White, heteronormative culture of OECs that study participants also shared the resistance strategies in which they engaged. Resistance was exhibited through some students’ efforts to work as counselors to ameliorate the OECs. Aïcha, Sharon, and Sam were motivated to improve the courses because of what they had observed and their negative experiences as students. Aïcha and Sharon, who both identify as Indian/South Asian, wanted to provide students with a less traumatic and less stressful swim test by providing alternatives for students who were not comfortable participating. While not all of their efforts were sanctioned by the course administrators, these student-counselors worked within their spheres of influence to make the swim test more inclusive. As counselors, Sam, Aïcha, and Sharon changed OEC demographics to better reflect the equity and inclusion mandate of the Kinesiology program. As counselors, they intentionally offered an authentic presence as racial and gender minorities to make other students feel included, inherently challenging and resisting the hidden curriculum underlying OECs.

The Maintenance of Eurocentric and Settler Epistemologies

The discursive language in the OEC documents and student experiences maintained Eurocentricity in two interrelated ways. The first was through a lack of acknowledgment and recognition of Indigenous peoples’ epistemologies and cultural associations with “adventure” activities in the curricular content of the OECs. The second was through the absence of discourses of settler-colonial histories and lack of acknowledgment relative to the land where OECs took place.

The activities outlined in all Course Registration Kits are connected to Indigenous peoples’ land-based cultures and ways of knowing, surviving, and thriving within the natural environment. The Course Registration Kits indicate activities such as “basic canoeing, war canoe, and kayaking” as well as “basic camp craft, and intro wilderness skills and survival.” One Course Registration Kit describes an overnight canoe portaging trip that introduces “various activities dealing with initiative [and] adaptation to the natural environment,” while promoting an “appreciation of various forms of nature from an
aesthetic point of view.” Although highly involved with the land, the water, and the natural environment, the language used in the Course Registration Kits implicitly maintains settler, Eurocentric epistemologies relating to the outdoors by privileging a singular understanding of nature (e.g., adaptation, initiative, aesthetics), rather than what Beckford et al. (2010) note from environmental education are potential spiritual, relational, or holistic approaches. This is reified through the complete absence of Indigenous epistemologies in the descriptions of the activities and the general learning objectives of the OECs.

The absence of any Indigenous epistemologies was especially stark in the pedagogy of the outdoor activities that are historically rooted in Indigenous cultures and understandings of the natural environment (McLean, 2013; Newbery, 2012). Aïcha reflects on the historical relationship of Indigenous peoples and outdoor wilderness activities.

’Cause, the thing is that like Indigenous peoples have been doing those types of [outdoor] activities for like thousands of years . . . as a part of their normal life. And then, like, white people have made it like this like recreational activity. After a long week of hard work, they go to their cottage and participate in these activities.

This highlights an important and invisible element of the program’s hidden curriculum. The imagined student who is learning life skills of adaptation and initiative is a person who may one day either engage in cottage life and/or make camping and wilderness activities part of their desired recreational outdoor activities. While wilderness skills in recreational activities such as canoeing, portaging, and overnight camping are prioritized, there is no anticipation that students need to broaden their understanding of, and relationship to, the land and water through Indigenous knowledges, spiritualities, histories, or peoples, or be aware of how settler-colonial pedagogies undergird Kinesiology OECs and the land on which they take place.

As noted previously, the camps are located in rural and northern Ontario highlands and national parks yet none of the four Course Registration Kits refer to the historical legacies of, conflicts that occurred on, or treaties associated with, the lands on which the camps operate. The absence of acknowledgments of histories, treaties, heritages, and lands that historically were, and still are, part of the material, spiritual, and sacred livelihood of Indigenous peoples reinforces what Hudson-Rodd (1998) refers to as the terra nullius myth. This absence implicitly suggests that local histories begin with settlers and camp owners, and privileges Eurocentric epistemologies and settler mythologies and their role in shaping Canada’s “northern wilderness” through adaptation and initiative.

All interviewees described the invisibility of Indigenous bodies and epistemologies within the documents, physical and sociocultural spaces, curricular content, or course delivery of the OECs. The lack of recognition of (Indigenous) place was described as intentional and part of a racist academic culture and structure. As they reflected on their work as student-counselors, Aïcha and Sharon both stated that some of their fellow counselors had engaged in a conversation with the administration about adding Indigenous components to the activity schedules and structures of the course, including land acknowledgments. Sam stated,
I kind of wished it was mandated for all of us to say what land we’re on . . . and I did so in my station . . . voluntarily saying that “we are on Indigenous land, that we need to respect it, we need to recognize our privilege on it.”

Despite the discussion that was initiated among student-counselors and the independent actions of some, like Sam, students interviewed reported there had been no initiative or efforts from the camp’s administration to incorporate any Indigenous land acknowledgments. Robinson et al. (2019) critique the ways land acknowledgments are delivered in academic settings that “elide the acknowledgment of other forms of structural and epistemic violence,” reducing the land acknowledgment to an inconsequential “spectacle . . . a public performance of contrition” (p. 20). Nevertheless, it is telling that even the most basic performance of reckoning with settler colonialism’s and specifically the university’s past and present were refused by the camp administration. According to the students interviewed, this decision aligns with many other courses and spaces within the Kinesiology program, where Indigeneity is rendered invisible.

Discussion

This study explores OEE, situated within a Canadian Kinesiology program through drawing on a critical race theoretical framework, which emphasizes listening to the voices of the marginalized and exposing structural racism and Whiteness in everyday practices. We examined the experiences of five Kinesiology undergraduate students and analyzed the written institutional discourses within six types of documents pertaining to the curriculum and pedagogy of a series of OECs.

The hidden curriculum of OEE requires the negotiation of Whiteness and settler colonialism, underpinned by Eurocentric imagination and ideals. The discourses produced through the Kinesiology program OEC documents maintain Whiteness, White privilege, and settler-colonial identities in OEE. This was illustrated through multiple assumptions in the texts about the student body as a homogeneous group, who are financially wealthy enough to shop at “high-end” camping equipment stores, and who are familiar with, and competent in, outdoor recreation activities including water activities, and the clothing and equipment “appropriate” for outdoor adventures. The imagined OEE student is key to the curricular design, course content, and the cultural environment created. Moreover, the constellation of these practices actively produce real OEE students, reinforcing year after year those who feel excluded from, and those who generate a connection to, “nature, the wilderness, and the north [that] have defined Canadian national identity often in racialized terms as white settler identity . . . since the formation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867” (Mackey, 2002, p. 72).

The OEE participants’ experiences in this study reinforce the findings of Gress and Hall (2017), regarding racialized students’ negative perceptions of OEE. Indeed, the Kinesiology program is complicit in reproducing and idealizing a particular heteronormative White subject of the outdoors through OECs’ assumptions and their lack of recognition of diverse student experiences and needs. The interview data also reified
the pervasiveness of Whiteness in OEE through the lack of racial diversity in the camp student-counselors, faculty and staff, as well as the lack of consideration for diverse cultures in the OEC programming, rendering racialized, international, queer, and some female students marginalized.

Moreover, the pervasive absenting of Indigeneity in this land-based education is palpable. This erasure of Indigenous bodies and histories or acknowledgment of land in the documents connected to the OECs is congruent with the existing literature which identifies the role of conventional Eurocentric approaches to OEE in perpetuating White privilege and settler-colonial discourses of benevolence and innocence (McLean, 2013; Mullins et al., 2016; Newbery, 2012; Rose & Paisley, 2012). The absence of Indigeneity in the content and pedagogy of the OECs, within Kinesiology programs that outwardly celebrate the importance of equity and outdoor education, continually perpetuates anti-Indigenous harm and ignores settler-colonial responsibilities for reconciliation and anti-oppression. Laurendeau (2020), drawing from Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), explains that invisibilizing Indigeneity from wilderness activities is part of “settler colonial structures, practices, and investments” oriented not only toward past colonialism but “toward continued dominance of settler colonial logics, that, as Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández argue, work toward replacement . . . of Indigenous peoples . . . [and] replacement of ideological challenges to the system of settler colonialism itself” (p. 89). Without education about settler colonialism in the OECs, future challenges to White supremacy are stifled.

The assumed positive learning outcomes of OEE must be critiqued because Indigenous peoples, their/our relation to the land, and Indigenous ways of knowing remain unknown to students. When camping, canoeing, and portaging are only framed as for recreation purposes, and when swimming is made mandatory despite the cultural and real fears students have about water, it is clear that experiences and learning outcomes are broadly aligned with White, male, middle-class, settler colonial leisure and education systems.

This research contributes to the existing literature on how OEE perpetuates White privilege and suggests the potential learning outcomes of OEE are not limited to physical and adaptive skills or positive psychological traits but can reproduce a hidden curriculum of White dominance. While OEE is offered through many institutions and through regulatory organizations, by exploring the specific place of OECs in Kinesiology student education, we demonstrate that the Eurocentric field of Kinesiology reproduces imagined Canadian wilderness subjects. In doing so, these courses do not capitalize on the great potential to use land-based education to challenge what Douglas and Halas (2013) describe as the Whiteness and racialized logics of Kinesiology education.

Where this study’s findings diverge from previous research is through combining analyses of curricular document discourses and participant experiences. Many university programs across Canada have commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion. More specifically, recently, they have published statements and reports denouncing anti-Black racism and are strategizing to reconcile with Indigenous peoples. Examination of program documents in conjunction with lived experiences reveals that a university
“commitment does not necessarily commit the institution to anything or to doing anything” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 116). Therefore, they can still be inequitable, exclusionary, and reproduce hegemonic settler colonialism. As we demonstrated, Kinesiology program documents can obscure an explicit and implicit culture of Whiteness that students are expected to assimilate to, or that they negotiate and in some cases, resist. This study builds on research that has provided counter-narratives of OEE (Gress & Hall, 2017) by specifically including and making visible racialized or queer Kinesiology/OEE students’ voices and experiences. This works to disrupt the singular Eurocentric narratives and legacies of White male privilege that have come to dominate university education broadly and outdoor education specifically.

When Kinesiology faculties reify and perpetuate discourses of settler colonialism for successive generations of OEE undergraduate students, they systematically contribute to the ongoing, violent, and exclusionary consequences of White, settler colonialism on Indigenous and racialized communities, and fail to teach settler students about their decolonial responsibilities. Decolonization, Johnson and Ali (2019) argue, takes an investment of time in relationships, and “it must help to restore or strengthen positive associations with Indigenous cultures, traditions, and identities,” rather than reinforce “a colonial agenda set on Indigenous erasure” (p. 12). Canadian universities (in general) and Kinesiology programs (in particular) are important sites to investigate racialization and Whiteness in OEE because students who graduate from Kinesiology programs are potential future educators, coaches, and trainers in physical education, recreation, fitness, outdoor sport, and in experiential education. The lessons from critical race theory provoke us to see the importance of teaching students to incorporate OEE as a method for learning to respect and value racialized and Indigenous peoples and counter-hegemonic epistemologies that challenge the operations of Whiteness in society. Moreover, as many universities in Canada have recently renewed their commitment to reckoning with anti-Black racism and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, developing perspectives on how to do this within each discipline is of critical importance. Consulting with all students about their experiences, with Indigenous land-based educators about alternative epistemologies, and with anti-racism educators, who specialize in challenging Whiteness, would be important first actions for universities, and for Kinesiology administration, staff, and faculty, committed to rebuilding OEE.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to research participants who gave their time. Thanks to Jason Laurendeau for helpful suggestions. This research was unfunded and no financial interest or benefit has arisen from the research.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Note
1. For more information on traditional territories of the Ojibway/Chippewa and Anishnaabeg peoples, see https://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017.05.31-Traditional-Territory-Acknowledgement-in-Ont.pdf. For details on the original peoples of the Haliburton Highlands, see http://www.haliburton echo.ca/tldsb-to-implement-indigenous-land-acknowledgement.

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