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## *Body Maps as Ecological, Affective, Relational and Decolonizing Method*

*Alexandra Fidyk*  
*University of Alberta*

### **Abstract:**

Building upon previous research (Fidyk 2019a, 2019b) aimed to support the mental health of vulnerable youth, this presentation focuses on body maps as an ecological, affective, relational and decolonizing method for data creation, collection and expression/presentation. Body maps, broadly defined, are life-size body images, while body mapping is the process of creating body maps using collage, photography, painting or other arts-integrated techniques to visually symbolize aspects of people's lives, bodies and worlds. Rooted in research regarding women's reproductive health and body biology in Jamaica (MacCormack, 1985), body maps became widely used as a method to study HIV/AIDS self-care needs. It has been used in community-based work in Zimbabwe (Cornwall, 1990) and South Africa (MacGregor, 2009), and in Brazil, Colombia, Canada and Mexico (Devine, 2008; Gastaldo et al., 2012; Gastaldo et al., 2018; Wienard, 2006). The use of body maps also enables participants to engage with sites of injury, even trauma, yet in a safe, playful way (Crawford, 2010; Haiman, 2013; van der Kolk, 2014; Orchard, 2017). Indigenist (Wilson, 2008), feminist, anti-colonial, anti-race and decolonizing theories value its trans nature because participants can "speak" through counter-hegemonic discourses. For example, participants rejected the naming of girl and boy, choosing "something in-between" but not opting for terms such as transgender. Of significance, body maps support poetic approaches to research that respect imagination, sensation and body awareness. The art of body mapping serves those who seek witnessing, testimony and social justice. Moving

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beyond a historical and contemporary analysis of the method, its strengths and limitations are discussed, particularly via interdisciplinary research and pedagogical praxis.

**Keywords:** body map; vulnerable youth; social-emotional wellbeing; decolonizing; relational; somatic; arts-integrated methods; contemplative practices; body; pedagogy

Figure



A Body Map

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## **Biographical Note**

Alexandra Fidyk serves as professor in the Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta. Her writing addresses the importance of silence and eros, imaginal and poetic sensibility, shadow work and ethics, and, more recently, trauma and transgenerational patterns. Her current research attends to the mental health and wellbeing of students and teachers across cultures in school contexts.