

## **JODI JOHN**

### **Starkey-Robinson Award for Graduate Research on Canada**

Professor John is now a Queen's National Scholar (tenure-track Assistant Professorship) in Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Community Health in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen's University. Prior to beginning her PhD in September 2019, she worked for over a decade as a registered dietician and diabetes educator, primarily for the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte at Tyendinaga, where she was born and raised in her culture as a Kanyen'kehá:ka (Mohawk) woman, and where she is raising her own family now. Given Professor John's professional and community involvement at the intersections of food sovereignty and community health/wellbeing, it is no surprise to me that she was the selected candidate to for this notable position.



I have had the privilege of observing and supporting Professor John's academic trajectory over the past four years. We began corresponding in 2019 to discuss master's studies in Public Health Sciences or Health Geography at Queen's given her interests in taking a critical approach to studying Indigenous health care services. In the end, Professor John chose the Department of Geography and Planning for its reputation as a community of critically engaged and courageous scholars; she began her studies with me in 2020. Witnessing Professor John's nascent academic prowess first-hand - through a graduate seminar I taught as well as her participation in a series of research projects in my Lab - I insisted that she fast-track to the PhD program.

Professor John has two undergraduate degrees. Her first degree is a BSc in Psychology/Biology at Trent University. Five years later, Professor John returned to university and did a second degree, this time in Dietetics and Human Nutrition at McGill, where she graduated with "Great Distinction". Entering graduate school in the Department of Geography and Planning, Professor John has shone academically, and this excellence was reflected across the board, with outstanding grades throughout her coursework and comprehensive exams, despite COVID-19, parenting/home-schooling, and community responsibilities in Tyendinaga. I have been continually impressed with her pursuit of research excellence, transitioning smoothly from her background in health sciences to her focus in the social sciences. Professor John's research skills now include a rich understanding of knowledge production, critical modes of inquiry, and participatory research, particularly concerning Indigenous methodologies.

I am not alone in recognizing the potential of this early career researcher. Professor John received over \$300,000 in scholarship funding. In the first year of her graduate program, she received an Indspire 'Building Brighter Futures' award, a National Indian Brotherhood Trust Fund Scholarship, and a Queen's Graduate Award. In her second year, Professor John received a CIHR-funded Indigenous Mentorship Network (Ontario) Graduate Scholarship and a Queen's Teyonkwyenawakon Scholarship, the former in recognition of her community-engaged scholarship and the latter for her academic excellence. In 2022, not only did Professor John receive renewal (competitive) funding from the Indigenous Mentorship Network, but she also received a SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarships - Doctoral Program valued at \$105,000. Outstandingly, she declined both awards to accept a prestigious three-year Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship

(\$150,000), which was awarded in recognition of her combined academic excellence, research potential, and leadership.

At the start of her PhD program, Professor John worked as a Research Assistant for me, exploring the role of Indigenous ceremonialists and the importance of ceremony during COVID-19. She provided exceptional research support that led to the idea-formulation and writing about who has the power to determine what qualifies as ‘essential services’ under COVID-19; it was published in *The Conversation*: John, J., Castleden, H., Phillips, W., Mashford-Pringle, A., Calabretta, M., Dockstator, M., Hill, J. (2021.) Who decides what is essential? The importance of ceremony during Covid-19. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/who-decides-whats-essential-the-importance-of-indigenous-ceremonyduring-covid-19-159793>

As a healthcare provider in her own community, Professor John observed how health outcomes improved when she and other healthcare providers applied their Kanyen’kehá:ka values of relationality over their western training. This became her central thesis: How do community values and ethics shape healthcare when both the provider and client are from the same community. She engaged with research participants who shared what health meant to them, how community-based healthcare differs from western clinical care, and how these differences impacted their healthcare experience. Professor John found that when their relationships were rooted in community connection and caring practices, it led to greater engagement in healthcare services, and, for some, it increased their motivation for self-care. Her work shows the transformative potential of embracing Indigenous values in defining and nurturing health. It underscores the importance of community connection in health and strengthens the need for Indigenous-led solutions to address health disparities in Canada. It also validates the experiences of Indigenous healthcare providers who balance professional standards with community values.

The outputs of Professor John’s doctoral research will benefit her Nation and lead to positive outcomes in other Indigenous contexts as well as in the academy and in policy arenas. Professor John’s research is making key contributions to three bodies of literature: 1) Indigenous sovereignty, resurgence, and self-determination, 2) Indigenous methodologies and research ethics, and 3) critical Indigenous health geographies. Two of her dissertation publications were accepted before she defended her PhD:

John, J., & Castleden, H. (2024). “Dear John”: Overriding institutional axiology by privileging Indigenous relational ethics. *Research Ethics*, 17470161241288649.

John, J., & Castleden, H. (2025). “Because you love us as much as we love you”: The role of community relationships in facilitating Indigenous engagement in healthcare. *Social Science & Medicine*, 365, 117532.

In sum, Professor John is nothing short of a first-class critical scholar and health researcher. Her intellectual curiosity, analytical thinking, independence, initiative, and drive shine through in her work. Her interdisciplinary skills in health geography and in Indigenous methodologies has prepared her to transition into an independent researcher. She has the capacity to successfully navigate the challenges of the tenure-track and she will make significant contributions to her community, Indigenous Peoples more broadly, and the geographical literature on Indigenous Peoples’ health and environments as well as health policy settings and society at large. I believe that Professor John is an exceptional candidate for the Starkey-Robinson Award for Graduate

Research on Canada. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information about her outstanding candidature for the award.

- Heather Castleden, PhD