**A Research Plan Guide for Aboriginal Higher Degree by Research Students**

**• Title (working title)**

The effects of nature-based therapy on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal men in Tasmania.

**• Background, rationale and significance**

This research proposal aims to examine the effectiveness of nature-based therapeutic programming for enhancing the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal men. The primary aim of this thesis is to provide a sociological and social work understanding of nature-based therapy and understand its usefulness for improving Aboriginal men’s health and wellbeing. Drawing on previous work on Indigenous masculinity and a strengths-based approach, the research proposal aims to develop a narrative of Aboriginal men in contemporary Australia. A qualitative empirical study will be used to explore the experiences of Aboriginal men participating in a nature-based therapy and its effectiveness to enhance health and wellbeing.

The health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been described as the great Australian shame. Most current studies of Aboriginal health and wellbeing examining the effectiveness of Western approaches provide little attempt at understanding Indigenous worldviews, and marginalise Indigenous voices. There is minimal literature exploring the effects of nature-based therapeutic programming with Aboriginal people despite nature being a central component of Indigenous identity and culture. From this perspective a sociological and social work informed qualitative study of nature-based therapy is clearly relevant to current federal, state and territory government initiatives (see Closing the Gap (Holland 2018)).

According to the Australian Department of Health and Ageing (2013) Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander men have the worst health of any group in Australia. Despite this, relevant policies do not specifically explain how the issue will be improved. Existing research demonstrates the complexity of the problems facing Australian Indigenous men. The intersection of masculinity and Indigeneity, compounded by colonisation, historical policies, stigma, marginalisation, trauma, grief and loss of identity are key factors that shape these poor health outcomes. These poor health outcomes are acknowledged in federal and some state government policies but not implemented.

Effective models of intervention to improve men’s health outcomes include men’s groups, men’s sheds, men’s health camps/bush adventure therapy, fathering groups and mentoring programs. Further research needs to be undertaken, with a greater emphasis on preventative health measure, adequate specific funding, culturally and gender appropriate responses to health, and government policy development and implementation covering Aboriginal male health.

**• Objectives/aims/questions**

1. The primary aim of this thesis is to provide a sociological and social work understanding of nature-based therapy and understand its usefulness for improving Aboriginal men’s health and wellbeing.
2. A secondary aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding of Aboriginal masculinity in Australia.
3. The third aim of this thesis is to reorientate Aboriginal male narratives to a strengths-based approach away from the dominant deficit discourses.

**• Methodology**

The theory of “Indigenous standpoint” (Foley 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2013) will be used to emphasise an Aboriginal worldview and utilised throughout this research project. Often studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing are from the standpoint of non-Indigenous researchers. An individual’s worldview influences the conceptualisation, undertaking, analysis and dissemination of research. In tertiary education institutions and some other locations of knowledge creation, the normalised worldview is that of Western society (Connell 2007). The author of this research proposal thesis identifies as a Worimi (Australian Aboriginal) male, born and raised on Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) Country. As such, an Indigenous standpoint is used throughout.

The method used will be semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal men that participated in nature-based therapeutic programming delivered through Karadi Aboriginal Corporation. This method will be used in conjunction with grounded theory and thematic analysis of data.

**• Timeline**

**Based on full-time load, double if part-time**

2017 Feb-July: Literature Review

2017 July-September: Confirm methodology and method

2017 September-November: Ethics Application

2018 December- March: Data Collection

2018 April-September- Data Analysis.

2018 October – 2018 July: Write draft chapters

2018 July – February 2020: Finalise Chapters

2020 February – 2020 July: Prepare thesis for submission.

**• Project budget**

No additional resources ae needed to undertake this research project.

**• References**

Australian Department of Health and Ageing 2013, 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023', *Australian Department of Health and Ageing*.

Connell, R 2007, *Southern theory : the global dynamics of knowledge in social science* Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest.

Foley, D 2003, 'Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous standpoint theory', *Social Alternatives*, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 44.

Holland, C 2018, *Close the gap 2018 - a ten year review: the Closing the Gap Strategy and Recommendations for Reset*, Canberra.

Moreton-Robinson, A 2013, 'Towards an Australian Indigenous women's standpoint theory: A methodological tool', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 28, no. 78, pp. 331-347.