

**A critical hermeneutic perspective in the
context of an Aboriginal wellbeing
program on Gumbaynggirr Country,
Australia**

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Statement of originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

07/02/2024

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Acknowledgement of authorship

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains published paper/s/scholarly work of which I am a joint author. I have included as part of the thesis a written declaration endorsed in writing by my supervisors, attesting to my contribution to the joint publication/s/scholarly work.

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I would like to extend my acknowledgement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who are reading this thesis. I also extend this acknowledgement to First Nations Peoples from around the world who are reading this manuscript.

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Author's notes

Definition of terms

I recognise and hold the tension that the complex and rich identities of First Nations People cannot be appropriately represented by simplified English terminology. I will respectfully use the terms First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander people throughout this thesis.

I have used the term Indigenous or First Nations when referring to the broader First Nations community, which includes either Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People from Australia or First Nations Peoples from other colonised countries, including Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, and the United States of America. My use of terminology, Indigenous or First Nations, varies between chapters in this thesis, reflecting my understanding of the changing academic and community discourses over the duration that this thesis was written. Journal requirements and reviewer comments have also influenced the choice of terminology over the different thesis chapters.

I have used the term Aboriginal when referring to research participants, the local community, and Aboriginal co-researchers on Gumbaynggirr Country, New South Wales, Australia, as this is the term they identify with. I have respectfully used the term Aboriginal when referring to First Nations Peoples from the mainland of Australia, including Tasmania.

Throughout this thesis, I have referred to the concepts of colonialism and colonisation rather than neocolonialism. Both colonialism and neocolonialism are oppressive systems with ongoing impacts on subjugated peoples that have led to power imbalances between the coloniser and the colonised. Although there are subtle differences between the two concepts, scholars use them interchangeably in the literature. For clarity, I have used the concept of colonialism throughout this thesis as

an overarching notion to describe the ongoing explicit and implicit subjugation of First Nations Peoples in Australia. The concept of colonialism is enduring and continues to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia. For instance, when we initially based the study on ‘measuring success’, it implied an insidious form of neo-colonialism tied to a colonial ideology (see Box 4.1, Chapter 4 for my reflections on ‘success’). Hence, there was a need to decolonise both researchers and research.

Throughout this thesis I have purposefully used capitalisation for important First Nations concepts to support cultural sensitivity, recognition, and respect, with an intention to promote greater awareness of First Nations cultures and their profound contributions to society. Terms capitalised in this thesis include ‘Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing’, ‘Entities’, ‘Yarning,’ and ‘Country’; however, this was not always possible due to publication constraints. Words including ‘western’ and ‘eurocentric’ were purposely not capitalised in this thesis, except when constrained by publication requirements. By keeping these words in lowercase, I aim to challenge implicit assumptions of western superiority. Throughout this manuscript, I will refer to myself in the first person. My chosen methodologies involve my interpretations and collaborative discourses that have informed the findings and transformed my understandings, so I feel it would be inappropriate to distance myself from my writing.

Overarching statement of contribution

Developing this statement was challenging as I felt a risk of exerting western dominant research practices expected in academic settings, as well as overstating my contribution relative to how co-researchers, dialogue partners (explained further below and in section 1.3.7) and I developed knowledge presented in thesis Chapters 3-7. At the same time, I understand this statement is necessary to clarify my role as a doctoral candidate.

As the doctoral candidate, I have driven the development and completion of the research project, overseeing all stages from conceptualisation to final analysis and write-up. This work was completed under the supervision of Associate Professor

Leanne Brown, Dr Karin Fisher, and Dr Kerith Duncanson. My supervisors provided guidance, advice, and direction for the research. They also offered encouragement and support throughout this doctoral research program. Supervisors provided feedback on theoretical and methodological aspects, proofread manuscripts for publication, and reviewed the text of this thesis. Aunty Karen Roberts supported ongoing cultural mentorship throughout the research program (see section 1.3.5, which explores Aunty Karen Roberts' role in more depth).

My work has involved building and sustaining community relationships, project management, developing and maintaining ethics, formulating the research questions, designing the methodology, conducting data collection, and performing comprehensive analyses. I have collaborated with dialogue partners, which has resulted in the co-authorship of four published papers and one paper under review. I have used the phrase 'dialogue partner' to refer to Aboriginal and non-Indigenous researchers and co-authors on publications, who engaged in collaborative dialogues to inform the research (see section 1.3.7 for further detail). Additionally, I worked alongside co-researchers who contributed their knowledge and expertise to the findings of this research project. I have used the word 'co-researcher' to refer to research participants who participated in collaborative Yarning and interpretation of findings that are presented in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis (see section 1.3.7 for further detail).

As the first author of the publications (published and under-review), I drafted all manuscripts. I facilitated an iterative and critical process by checking back with co-researchers and dialogue partners' understandings to represent many voices in the findings (the contribution statements for each article are in Appendices 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, and 7.1). These co-authored works highlight the collaborative and relational nature of my research approach and my ability to effectively collaborate with, contribute to and be inclusive of diverse perspectives within the field.

Publications arising from this thesis

This thesis is presented with the inclusion of four peer-reviewed manuscripts. This thesis comprises of four of these manuscripts (Chapters 3-6)

Manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals: Published

1. **Urquhart, L.**, Brown, L., Duncanson, K., Roberts, K., & Fisher, K. (2020). A dialogical approach to understand perspectives of an Aboriginal wellbeing program: An extension of Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1-10.
2. **Urquhart, L.**, Fisher, K., Duncanson, K., Roberts, K., Munro, S., Gibbs, C., & Brown, L. (2021). First Nation Peoples' nutrition and exercise group programs: Transforming success through the lifeworld. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 16(1), 1-16.
3. **Urquhart, L.**, Roberts, K., Gibbs, C., Fisher, K, Brown, L., & Duncanson, K. (2022). Experiences of co-designing research about a rural Aboriginal wellbeing program: Informing practice and policy. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 30 (6), 703-892.
4. **Urquhart, L.**, Roberts, K., Duncanson, K., Brown, L., & Fisher, K. (2023). Sustaining an Aboriginal wellbeing program: Informing health promotion practice and policy. *Australian Journal of Health Promotion*, Early view, 1-13.

Manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals: Under review

This thesis is presented with the inclusion of one manuscript that is currently under peer review (Chapter 7).

1. **Urquhart, L.,** Roberts, K., Duncanson, K., Brown, L., & Fisher, K. (2023). Sustaining an Aboriginal Wellbeing program in Australia: Insights for transformative health service practices. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

Conference presentations arising from this thesis

During my candidature, the following abstracts were presented at conferences related to this thesis:

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1. **Urquhart, L.** (2018, October 29). *Inspirations from our ethics journey (and approval)* [Online presentation]. University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health Engaging with Research Practice. Australia.
2. **Urquhart, L., Roberts, K.** (2019, June 4). *Mutual respect for ways of knowing, doing, and learning: Collaborative yarning to understand an Aboriginal wellbeing program* [Presentation]. Galambila Aboriginal Health Service, Coffs Harbour, NSW Australia.
3. **Urquhart, L.** (2021, December 7). *Knowledge sharing* [Online presentation]. University of Newcastle Department of Rural Health, Teaching and Learning Day. Australia.
4. **Urquhart, L.** (2022, March 21). *Exploring strengths of an Aboriginal nutrition and exercise wellbeing program* [Online presentation]. Rural Research Capacity Building Program. NSW, Australia.
5. **Urquhart, L., Roberts, K.** (2023, August 18). *Collaborative yarning and collage to co-interpret lifeworld qualities that sustain an Aboriginal wellbeing program* [Presentation]. Galambila Aboriginal Health Service, Coffs Harbour, NSW, Australia.
6. **Urquhart, L.,** (2023, September 13). *Rural health and research practice – Coffs Harbour NSW* [Online Webinar]. Dietitians Australia Masterclass: Bringing the Country to the City – Highlighting practice outside the major city centres webinar. NSW, Australia.
7. **Urquhart, L.** (2023, November 2) *Rural health and research practice – Coffs Harbour* [Online presentation]. Australian Nutrition Collaborative for Health Outcomes in Rural (ANCHOR) populations. NSW, Australia.

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Abstract

The diverse and holistic wellbeing needs of First Nations Peoples in Australia have been marginalised by dominant research and health service policies and practices which prioritise western paradigms. The aim of this thesis was to engage with critical hermeneutics to transform understandings and practices in the context of the Aboriginal Wellbeing program, Spring into Shape, situated on Gumbaynggirr Country, Australia. Through a lens of Habermas' theory of communicative action, the research approach was collaborative and dialogical, guided by the local Aboriginal Health Service staff and community members. Throughout this research, ongoing community engagement was maintained. Three layers of praxis: i) understanding my own process, ii) informing self and others, and iii) interrogating western modernity; provided an approach to link understandings and practices for self-determination of First Nations' holistic wellbeing.

I am a non-Indigenous person, who collaborated with three Aboriginal dialogue partners, one of whom acted as a cultural mentor, and three non-Indigenous dialogue partners across this thesis. Fifteen participants and staff from the Spring into Shape program engaged in individual Yarning, with nine participants becoming co-researchers through their contributions to two half-day collaborative Yarning sessions. Individual and collaborative Yarning transcripts, as well as published literature and diarised reflections, were used as data for critical hermeneutic interpretation.

Informed by collaborative Yarning, this thesis presents actions that health professionals, policymakers, researchers, and educators can take to actively disrupt dominant research and health service understandings and practices. The actions are grounded in critical reflection, collaborative approaches, and shared communication. The three layers of praxis threaded throughout this thesis contribute to the culmination of a model of transformed practice called *walking alongside* that guides

towards a praxis. Empowering those involved in wellbeing programs, the model advocates for reform that respects the capability and cultural legitimacy of a lifeworld approach, striving towards First Nations' holistic wellbeing and self-determination.