Reviewer's report

Title: Aboriginal perspectives on active living in remote Australia: a qualitative exploration of the socio-cultural link between health, the environment and economics

Version: 1 Date: 4 January 2013

Reviewer: Darrel Manitowabi

Reviewer's report:

In this article the authors examine the Indigenous Australian cultural perception of physical activity as it relates to the environment in the context of competing land-based and industrial economies in two Northern Territory communities. Qualitative, ethnographic and participatory action research forms the basis of their methodologies. In total 23 interviews were completed and five research-focused paintings were commissioned. The findings reveal an Indigenous perception of physical activity that is embedded in their environment and livelihoods. This is contrasted with the dominant non-Indigenous paradigm of physical activity that is isolated from this context in time and space. The authors recommend health promotion initiatives be re-articulated to validate Indigenous forms of physical activity and future physical activity promotion initiatives reflect a compatibility with the reality of Indigenous life ways and experiences. This research makes an important contribution to the literature on the Indigenous perception of physical activity as it relates to peoplehood, the environment, epistemology, ontology and practice. This article is a refreshing and new way of understanding cultural incompatibilities with health promotional efforts with Indigenous peoples.

Discretionary Revisions:

1) On the top of page 5, the term “post-colonial” is referenced without situating its problematic as expressed in the literature on colonialism and Indigenous peoples. This article clearly reveals a creeping colonialism at work that is challenging, refuting and ultimately assimilating Indigenous modes of physical activity and livelihood. Thus, “post-colonial” is out-of-place and its use needs to be clarified.

2) The authors invoke Bourdieu’s habitus to explain Indigenous and non-Indigenous incongruities with physical activity, the environment and work. This theoretical engagement is compatible with the research findings. However, a secondary source is referenced and Bourdieu’s original (1977) work is not. I recommend the authors either reference some of his work (original or subsequent works), or better situate its exclusion by emphasizing its re-articulation in the secondary source.

3) My final discretionary revision relates to two alternative theoretical
contributions this research makes and the authors may wish to explore. The first relates to Mary-Ellen Kelm’s (1999) work on colonizing bodies. Her work focused on how government policies transformed Indigenous bodies by removing, relocating and banning Indigenous healing traditions. I see similarities with this research and Kelm’s. Though dominant non-Indigenous Australian health promotion initiatives are not framed explicitly in this same way, the objective is the same: impose a Eurocentric logic on Indigenous peoples.

4) A second theoretical alternative the authors may consider is engaging with Tim Ingold’s work on Indigenous perceptions of the environment (2000) and human movement and knowledge (2011). Ingold’s insights reveal how and why Indigenous peoples experience the environment in the ways they do and he demonstrates a science of culture and a culture of science. These are similar themes the authors are engaging.

Literature Cited


Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.