



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA (University of Calgary, 2001)

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**“Decolonizing Bodies: A First Nations Perspective on the Determinants of Urban Indigenous Health and Wellness in Canada”**

Department of Sociology

Friday, April 21, 2017

9:00AM

David Turpin Building

Room A144

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Douglas Baer, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. William Carroll, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)

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## **Abstract**

The adverse effects of colonialism have been identified as a determinant of poor health, resulting in lower states of wellness in Indigenous peoples and communities (Reading et al, 2007, Gone, 2011; Ahenakew, 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2012; Gone, 2013; Smith, 2012; Reading et al, 2007; White et al, 2009). This has influenced Indigenous peoples' efforts to shape and determine their well-being through the resurgence of Indigenous worldviews as a strengths-based response to ongoing colonial practices. Research into Indigenous resistance and resurgence (Alfred, 2008) has shown that the sense of historical connectedness that Indigenous peoples maintain through participation in cultural activities, and traditional land-based practices helps them cope with the adverse impacts of colonization. Indigenous scholars are aware that Indigenous peoples who know who and what they are can make healthier lifestyle decisions (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Ahenakew, 2012; Corntassel, 2012; Corntassel, 2008; Baskin, 2005; Gone, 2011; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Gone et al, 2010; Gone et al, 2014; Kelley et al, 2012; Kenny et al, 2004; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2012; Kral, 2012; Lawson-Te Aho & Liu, 2010; Mundel & Chapman, 2010; Wilson & Rosenberg, 2002).

Through a research partnership with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and using mixed methods participatory action research this Dissertation critically engages with dominant Western-based knowledge systems of well-being from a decolonizing standpoint to better understand the determinants of Indigenous health and well-being. This study specifically asks: what are the main factors effecting different dimensions of well-being for Indigenous peoples living in urban centres, how does engaging in traditional land-based activities and cultural ways of life effect well-being, and to what extent does intergenerational trauma impact well-being? Thirteen key informant interviews were conducted with FNHA members involved in the development of the First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness (FNPOW) to garner knowledge about the thoughts, feelings, belief systems, values, and knowledge frameworks that are embedded in this perspective. A multi-level statistical model was developed informed by the First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness, the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey and 2011 National Household Survey, to produce health and wellness outcomes. Using a strength-based approach to well-being this study shows that the FNPOW advocates self-determination, and implementing the perspective in research work offers a pathway to generating measures of health and wellness rooted in Traditional knowledge systems, and a pathway to decolonizing bodies. These outcomes are a form of social capital reflective of Indigenous values that can be utilized as a resource to strengthen community capacity to support Indigenous self-determination.

*Keywords:* urban Indigenous, self-determination, reconciliation, decolonization, participatory action research, social determinants, well-being, social capital