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Higher education aspirations, participation, and achievement of Australian Indigenous males

James A. Smith, Himanshu Gupta, Sam Moore, Jesse Fleay, Garth Stahl, Bep Uink, Andrew Harvey, Peter Radoll, Braden Hill, Rebecca Bennett, Jahdai Vigona and Anthony Merlino

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We would like to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the traditional custodians of the land and seas of Australia and pay respects to elders' past, present and emerging. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not a homogeneous group, exhibiting important differences in culture, traditions, and language. However, the term Indigenous has been used interchangeably throughout this report for brevity.

We thank all participants who were involved over the course of this project. People gave generously of their time to participate and provided their opinions, which may inform culturally-responsive and gender-sensitive strategies that can be adopted by various sectors to increase university participation and completion rates among this cohort.

We also thank NCSEHE for funding this important research project.

Dedication

The research team would like to dedicate this report to a team member, Professor Dennis McDermott, who passed away during the course of the project. He was a strong supporter for strengthening Indigenous higher education pathways and his legacy lives on through the outcomes of this project.

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Executive summary

This report summarises the findings of the project 'Higher Education Aspirations, Participation, and Achievement of Australian Indigenous males[1]', led by the Freemasons Centre for Male Health and Wellbeing – Northern Territory at Menzies School of Health Research.

Qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with Indigenous male students and alumni (n = 19) across five state and territory jurisdictions (NT, WA, VIC, ACT and QLD) to gain insights into participants' aspirations for, and engagement and participation in, higher education[2]. It is important to acknowledge that this project is non-Indigenous led. However, the research team included multiple Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and educators from across Australia, aiming to include the integration of Indigenist perspectives and adopt (wherever possible) principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty throughout the different stages of research design, fieldwork, analysis, and knowledge translation.

Findings highlighted the aspirations of Indigenous men and their families to engage in higher education. The aspirations were motivated by a desire to acquire knowledge and skills to gain employment, invest in community development, and to mentor peers and family members. Participants were motivated to pursue topics they were passionate about and sought to embed Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into theories and practice.

Enabling factors to pursue higher education included structural supports within universities that sustained their studies. The supports included flexible course arrangements, timelines and deadlines, provision of scholarships to cover living and study expenses, and access to Indigenous student support services. These supports were most effective when used in conjunction with effective evidence-based study habits. On the other hand, barriers to engaging in higher education included financial constraints, a lack of academic preparation in high school, and perceived mystification of university shaped by a lack of general awareness and course promotion. Finally, barriers to sustaining higher education also emerged, including those associated with COVID-19 disruptions to study schedules and routines.

It is recommended that higher education institutes develop promotional campaigns featuring Indigenous male role models and their education stories, particularly education pathways that emphasise qualifications related to employment in health, education, and welfare sectors.

The rise of online courses creates the potential for higher education to meet Indigenous men in their place, Country, and community, allowing them to maintain a connection to social and cultural supports. There is also a need for government grants and university in-kind contributions to libraries and community centres in remote locations for computers, books, and other study materials designed to increase higher education awareness, computer literacy, and ultimately participation in online university courses. Scholarships covering study costs and living expenses are vital entry factors to higher education for Indigenous men,

[1] In this study we use the term 'males' rather than 'men'. This is an attempt to acknowledge cultural lore and be inclusive of males who have been through an initiation ceremony and those who have not had the opportunity to do so (Smith, Drummond, Adams et al., 2019; Adams, Smith & Fleay, 2021). This is consistent with national policy frameworks relating to, and developed by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males. The authors recognise that the category 'sex' (male) and 'gender' (men/masculinities) are both important concepts from a dominant Western perspective, and that these terms have different meanings. We maintain that sociological understandings of gender are best understood alongside intersections with age and culture (Merlino, Smith & Adams, 2020; Smith, Merlino, Adams et al., 2020; Smith, Merlino, Christie, et al., 2020).

[2] In this study, higher education refers to university education.

many of which experience cumulative equity impacts, such as remoteness, or lower socioeconomic status.

This report explains how and why Indigenous men engage and succeed in higher education. However, further research is needed, including perspectives from family, community members, those who may be reluctant to engage in higher education and those at risk of disengaging from education to fully understand the multifaceted, often intergenerational journey for Indigenous men to participate in higher education. Culturally responsive and gender-sensitive strategies that can be adopted by various sectors to increase university participation and completion rates among this cohort are also urgently needed.

Recommendations

Higher education institutions can:

- Acknowledge the under-representation of Indigenous males in higher education and prioritise targeted education and social supports
- Work towards building an evidence base about strategies that better support Indigenous males to navigate the intersections between, and cumulative impacts of, gender, age, and culture.
- Expand targeted scholarship and program supports for Indigenous male students to support their transition into, and sustain participation within, university. These should include supports for study materials, travel (particularly for students living away from home) and social supports that improve their health and wellbeing.
- Provide free classes, equipment, and resources to remote community centres and libraries to simultaneously build community relationships, and improve higher education awareness and engagement.
- Promote the stories of current Indigenous students, community members and alumni in promotional campaigns aimed at attracting and retaining Indigenous males in higher education.
- Expand the number of Indigenous study mentors (particularly male mentors) and programs on campus to provide academic support and to reduce feelings of alienation that Indigenous male students may face.

Governments and funding bodies can:

- Identify Indigenous males as a priority (sub)population in higher education policy and program settings at a national level
- Fund higher education instutitions to develop and implement targeted programs and services for Indigenous males,, including those: (a) aspiring to pursue higher education; and (b) currently participating in higher education.
- Invest more heavily in travel scholarships to support students to return home during semester breaks .

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Nine years ago, the review of higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (respectfully Indigenous hereon)[3] people provided a clear roadmap for action to achieve parity with non-Indigenous counterparts (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012). This has resulted in welcome policy and practice investments across the sector (Frawley, Smith, & Larkin, 2015; Frawley, Smith, & Larkin, 2017). Yet, the goal for parity has remained elusive (Wood et al., 2019).

Educational systems place multiple constraints on Indigenous people striving to participate and achieve in higher education (Behrendt et al., 2012; Frawley et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2019). Non-Indigenous Australians aged 25–34 years have substantially higher educational attainment (Certificate III and above) rates compared with their Indigenous counterparts (72% vs. 42% respectively) (Productivity Commission, 2021). University enrolments and course completions for Indigenous Australians has improved in recent years. For example, there was a 90 per cent increase (from 11,024 to 21,033) and more than a doubling (108% increase from 1,424 to 2,964) in the number of Indigenous university enrolments and completions between 2010 and 2019, respectively (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). However, despite this progress, Indigenous Australians continue to be underrepresented in universities making up only two per cent of the higher education population in 2019, while representing 3.3 per cent of Australia's total population (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). However, this gap is lower in the 25-34 years age group (2.3% Indigenous students vs. 3.3% of the total Indigenous Australian population) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). While Indigenous student enrolments and completions continue to grow, more effort to ensure that universities are welcoming and culturally safe spaces, is important (Smith & Robertson, 2020; Robertson, Smith & Larkin, 2021). Similarly, greater investment in growing the Indigenous academic workforce, and embedding Indigenous focused curricula within courses, have also been identified as important strategies to provide a more supportive and decolonising educational environment (Buckskin & Tranthim-Fryer, 2018; Smith & Robertson, 2020; Robertson, Smith & Larkin, 2021).

In Australia, Indigenous men are under-represented in higher education across all equity groups – including regional and remote, low socio-economic status, non-English speaking backgrounds, and those with disabilities – except for the obvious exception of women in non-traiditional areas (Tomaszewski et al., 2018). While Indigenous males have reasonable rates of participation in Vocational Education and Training, they are far less likely to engage in university than Indigenous females (Shalley, Smith, Wood, Fredericks, & Robertson, 2019; Smith et al., 2017). That is, for every Indigenous male in higher education there are approximately three Indigenous females, an impressive outcome indicating that Indigenous females are thriving in higher education despite the many barriers they also face (Shalley et al., 2019; Tomaszewski et al., 2018). The total number of enrolments per year for Indigenous females increased substantially (from 6885 in 2009 to 14,146 in 2019) compared with Indigenous males in the corresponding period (3515 to 6887), expanding the gender participation gap (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020). This means that Indigenous Australian males face cumulative impacts associated with both gender and race

[3] For the purposes of this chapter, Indigenous refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or Australian First Nations people, unless specified otherwise. The term is used for brevity. The authors respectfully acknowledge the diversity of views about using these terms.

when attempting to pursue higher education (Shalley et al., 2019). Given these barriers, the enrolment, participation, and completion rates of Indigenous males in higher education is a major concern. However, it is important not to frame this problem as a competition between genders. There are clearly unique and significant challenges that women face, especially those from non-traditional backgrounds, when pursuing higher education. It is a remarkable achievement that women from non-traditional areas have achieved this elevated engagement rate and more than doubled their enrolment rate over a 10-year period (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020).

The under-representation of Indigenous males in university is stark, with very little known about what career and education pathways Indigenous males are pursing outside of university or how to increase their participation among males who wish to attend university. Likewise, there is minimal indication that under-representation of Indigenous males has been considered comprehensively within the Indigenous or student equity higher education policy and practice realms.

In 2012, a review of higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people provided a clear roadmap for action to achieve parity with non-Indigenous counterparts, which resulted in policy and practice investments across the sector (Behrendt et al., 2012; Frawley et al., 2015). A recent Office of Learning and Teaching report also identified multiple enablers for improving educational outcomes for Indigenous higher education across Australia (Wood et al., 2019). In addition, a research project, funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), revealed that self-efficacy was a powerful driver of success in higher education among Indigenous Australians (Frawley, Ober, Olcay, & Smith, 2017).

While important, previous research did not offer gender-specific strategies to inform policy and practice improvements for Indigenous males. Given the gendered disparities in higher education access among this cohort, a closer examination of Indigenous male participation and experience at university is required to address this significant student equity and gender gap. Likewise, the higher education sector requires greater understanding of the way university-engaged Indigenous males conceptualise their higher education aspirations, participation, and achievement. Such understandings can help to enhance outreach, engagement, and retention activities specifically targeting Indigenous boys and men. For example, a recent forum (October 2021) targeting young Indigenous males was jointly facilitated by Menzies School of Health Research and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, to promote education and workforce pathways relating to health and community services, particularly those with a social and emotional wellbeing orientation. While successful, there was little evidence to guide the planning of this event.

Understanding the higher education aspirations of young Indigenous males, and the factors promoting higher education participation and achievement of adult Indigenous males, has social and economic benefits that extend beyond the higher education sector. For example, the Australian Government *National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030* identifies that education across the life course is a critical social determinant of health (Department of Health, 2019). Similarly, global evidence suggests that educational interventions aimed at reducing disengagement and attrition from school and higher education can yield wide-ranging benefits for men, particularly young males of colour from First Nations and African American backgrounds (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2018; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012; Smith, 2018). In Australia, however, there is presently minimal comparative education-oriented programs tailored for Indigenous males, with the exception of the Clontarf Foundation. The limited investment reflects the limited research on the unique higher education needs and experiences of this cohort (Gupta, Smith, Fleay, Lesiter, & Canuto, 2021; Stahl, McDonald, & Stokes, 2020). This project aims to address this gap.

Research examining the relationship between Indigenous males and the higher education system has strong potential to improve policy and practice responses – within the tertiary sector and beyond – and lay the foundation for educational, social, health, and economic improvements. Consequently, this study explores the higher education aspirations, participation, and achievement of Indigenous Australian males.

1.2 Aim & objectives

This study explored the intersection between cultural identity and gender among Indigenous males to better understand: (a) the higher education aspirations of Australian Indigenous males of any age; and (b) the critical success factors and influences that have supported Indigenous males to thrive and achieve in higher education.

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To build an evidence base about the further education aspirations of Indigenous men to better inform the development and implementation of outreach and enabling programs involving Indigenous males.
2. To identify and celebrate the critical success factors and influences among current Indigenous male higher education students and alumni, to better inform the development and implementation of strategies to attract and retain young Indigenous males in higher education.
3. To identify strategies that can be used by academic and support staff in higher education settings across Australia to increase the higher education participation and completion rates of Indigenous males.

The study was cross-jurisdictional and multi-institutional, with researchers from five Australian jurisdictions. The participating jurisdictions were the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, and Queensland. The researchers from each jurisdiction engaged Indigenous males through fieldwork in their respective states and territories. The project was a partnership between Menzies School of Health Research, Charles Darwin University, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, La Trobe University, the University of Queensland, and the University of Canberra.

1.3 The research team

The project was led through the Freemasons Centre for Male Health and Wellbeing – Northern Territory at Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) in collaboration with other research institutions from across Australia, and comprised Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. Team members included:

- Professor James Smith (Menzies) – non-Indigenous
- Dr Himanshu Gupta (Menzies) – non-Indigenous
- Mr Sam Moore (Menzies) – non-Indigenous
- Mr Anthony Merlino (Menzies) – non-Indigenous
- Mr Jahdai Vigona (Menzies) - IndigeSnous
- Dr Garth Stahl (University of Queensland) – non-Indigenous
- Professor Peter Radoll (University of Canberra) - Indigenous
- Mr Jesse J Fleay (Edith Cowan University) - Indigenous
- Dr Bep Uink (Murdoch University) - Indigenous
- Dr Rebecca Bennett (Murdoch University) – non-Indigenous
- Professor Andrew Harvey (La Trobe University) – non-Indigenous
- Professor Braden Hill (Edith Cowan University) - Indigenous
- Professor Dennis McDermott (La Trobe University) – Indigenous - now deceased

Chapter 2: Methodology and method

2.1 Methodology

As mentioned above, this study was a cross-jurisdictional study and involved a combination of qualitative approaches aligned with a decolonising research methodology. Following recent scholarship, this study adopted a decolonising methodology by aiming to amplify Indigenous cultural practices and ways of thinking, seeing, being, and doing (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020). Put another way, the study aimed to shift the focus of research towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, concerns, worldviews, theories, and research. In doing so, the project aimed to position Indigenous realities as foundational, while simultaneously acknowledging and dismantling the continuing colonial influences on their educational trajectories.

Although this project was non-Indigenous led, Indigenous perspectives and the adoption of Indigenous Data Sovereignty[4] were at the forefront of this research, where research benefits and methods were determined by Indigenous stakeholders (Lovett et al., 2019; Walter et al., 2021). For this reason, the research team deliberately included multiple Indigenous scholars and educators, helping to ensure an explicit Indigenist perspective was adopted throughout all stages of research design, fieldwork, analysis, and knowledge dissemination. This included both male and female Indigenous researchers. The project was governed by (a predominantly Indigenous) Research Management Group and guided by the strategic advice of three 'critical friends' with national and international expertise in equity and higher education; Indigenous health and wellbeing; Indigenous education; and youth engagement.

Helping advance the decolonising research methodology, Jesse Fleay, as an emerging Indigenous scholar and PhD student, and Jahdai Vigona, as an Indigenous Trainee and Project Assistant, were mentored by more senior team members – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous - as an explicit Indigenous research capacity building activity. We also acknowledge the white privilege afforded to many of the non-Indigenous researchers in the team, and the importance of supporting them to engage in culturally responsive trauma informed care (research practice), and to engage with, and adopt principles inherent in decolonising research approaches. In this sense, the project was a learning journey for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers alike.

2.2 Ethics

Ethics approval was granted by the Northern Territory Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (2019-3531; Appendix A). Reciprocal ethics approvals were subsequently obtained from the respective HREC's of other participating universities in the remaining four jurisdictions before data collection commenced. This included Edith Cowan University HREC (2020-01113); University of Queensland HREC (2020000154); La Trobe University HREC (2019-3531); and University of Canberra HREC (3392).

[4] We acknowledge that Indigenous Data Sovereignty is contested terrain and that gaps currently exist between theory and practice. We also acknowledge that this project reflects a collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, which limits the extent to which IDS can be achieved. Where possible, we used the key principles outlined in the Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective communique to guide our research process (https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/key-principles).

2.3 Method

The project involved three distinct but intersecting phases that drew on innovative methods to advance the decolonising research methodology:

Phase 1: Collating success stories of Indigenous male higher education students and alumni

This phase involved in-depth semi-structured individual qualitative interviews with Indigenous male higher education students and alumni across five state and territory jurisdictions (Northern Territory: *n*=5, Western Australia: *n*=2, Victoria: *n*=4, the Australian Capital Territory: *n*=4, and Queensland: *n*=4). This included students and alumni based in Darwin (Larrakia), Alice Springs (Arrernte), Perth (Noongar), Melbourne (Wurundjeri), Bendigo (Dja Dja Wurrung and Taurngurung), Canberra (Ngunnawal) and Brisbane (Turrbal and Jagera). Unfortunately, we did not collect information about the individual Indigenous language groups of each participant. A purposive sampling method was adopted, with Indigenous male students and alumni known to the research team invited to participate in the study. Each participant was emailed copies of the Participation Information Sheet (Appendix B) and Consent Form (Appendix C) prior to the interviews, to help them understand the study and the interview process and obtain consent to participate in the study. The signed Consent Forms were returned by each participant via email to the respective researcher. In some instances, participants preferentially chose to provide recorded oral consent. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions before, during, and after the interviews. An interview guide (Appendix D) was used to ask questions during the interview. The interviews were video-recorded (primarily via Zoom) and involved participants talking about the challenges and opportunities they had experienced while participating in, and/or completing, higher education. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes. The recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis by a secure transcription service. Each participant was given a $50 gift voucher for their participation in the study, as a token of appreciation for their time.

Phase 2: Identifying success factors to inform policy and practice improvement

This phase involved most investigators attending a half-day online coding and analysis workshop to review the content of interview transcripts. The original intent was to do this face-to-face, but COVID-19 prevented this from happening. The primary purpose of the analysis workshop was to identify success factors specific to Indigenous males, which could be incorporated into outreach, enabling recruitment and retention activities, and strategies planned and implemented by higher education institutions across Australia. An inductive thematic analysis approach was used to inform the initial coding framework. The framework was subsequently transcribed into NVivo 12 qualitative data management software and further refined in the analysis process.

Due to time constraints and competing work commitments, no Indigenous team members were able to assist with the initial coding, which resulted in the draft coding framework being developed by non-Indigenous team members. This was deemed unsatisfactory by both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous team members. Once discussed, the team engaged an Indigenous male team member, to review transcripts and amend the coding structure, when time permitted. This ensured Indigenous input in the way the data was managed and gave cultural integrity of the data analysis and interpretation process. This process guided the reporting and framing of this report.

The next stage involved using the interview data to produce vignettes focused on the thematic areas identified during coding and analysis processes. The vignettes were finally combined into YouTube videos approximately 2-3 minutes in length. Care was taken to ensure interview data reflected the cross-jurisdictional focus of the study. Under the supervision of CI Smith and Gupta, and with the support of Research Assistant Moore,

vignettes and YouTube videos were developed by an external communication agency with past experience producing videos for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education projects. All vignettes will be uploaded onto participating university YouTube channels at project completion. It was envisaged these vignettes could be used by the participating universities (and potentially other universities) in outreach and school engagement activities targeting young Indigenous males, and as teaching resources.

Phase 3: Knowledge translation and impact

An important aspect of community-focused research, particularly with Indigenous communities, is knowledge translation. To achieve this, we proposed 1) a half-day workshop to be held at the conclusion of the study to launch and promote the use of vignettes uploaded on participating university YouTube channels; 2) public release of the final project report; and 3) discussion on the success factors and respective policy and practice strategies identified during Phase 2 with key national stakeholders. We had intended for this to occur during the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) in Adelaide in 2020, but COVID-19 had resulted in the conference being rescheduled to 2022, after the project has finished.

Chapter 3: Results

The following chapter provides an overview of key themes that emerged during interviews with Indigenous males that have completed, or are currently completing, higher education in Australia.

3.1. Study motivations and aspirations

3.1.1 Higher education aspirations

Some students prioritised the attainment of a degree in preference to choosing a field of interest, recognising it as necessary in their future journey.

> *I always wanted to have a degree. I wasn't quite too sure about what I wanted to do. Coming out of high school, you never really understand where you want to go or what you want to be, but I always knew that I wanted to have a degree.*
>
> (30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

Others were pursuing alternative career pathways and never expected to participate in higher education:

> *I was going to do something like landscape design or something like that at TAFE. Hopefully do some bricklaying and try and - I was always a little bit more academic and I was going to use that type of side, so I was going to look at architecture and stuff like that. And I was sort of still in that building field.*
> *And then after a while I just decided that it was all too hard for me. It was flack knack, I was getting sunburnt, it was exhausting. And, yeah it was, I just decided look I don't really think this is going to be me.*
>
> (18-30, Bendigo, studying undergraduate)

Some Indigenous males aspired to be the first in their family to attend university, allowing them to share their skills and perspectives with the world:

> *University was the only opportunity for me to showcase my skills in the world. I am the first person in my family go to university, so that also makes it more valuable, I would say.*
>
> (18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

> *My granddad tried to go to university, but they couldn't afford it at the time. So I guess, I had a lot of people in my family who wanted to go to uni who didn't complete uni. And so they kind of wanted me to be that first to kind of come down and succeed.*
>
> (age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

In some instances, students in undergraduate degrees aspired to achieve postgraduate qualifications to develop specialised skills, indicative of aspirations to achieve higher education levels, as noted below:

I also do have ideas of where I might come back to uni, or if I want to stay on and do uni, like do my masters in teaching, potentially, is an idea I've got. Then another one is doing paramedicine, and like wilderness medicine and that sort of stuff, is another avenue that I'm also very interested in and considering So I've got some ideas of furthering my studies.

(18-30, Alice Springs, studying undergraduate)

3.1.2 Family values and community development

Community and education were explicitly linked in a cycle where community and family values compelled Indigenous males to seek a higher education qualification, allowing them to materially invest in, and contribute back to, their communities.

> *You need the community, you need the aunts and uncles out there saying, "No, Junior. You're going back to class to make sure it happens. If you need bus money or lunch money or whatever, we'll throw the hat around, and we will make it happen because that's important." So it needs to be a community education project.*
>
> (30-50, Melbourne, studying undergraduate)

Participants identified intergenerational values of education which motivated them to pursue higher education. Family members who had engaged in university in some way, whether by successfully completing a degree or through past participation, often incentivised Indigenous males to embark on their own higher education journey.

> *I had a lot of people in my family who wanted to go to uni who didn't complete uni. And so they kind of wanted me to be that first to kind of come down and succeed.*
>
> (age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

> *I think a big thing for me is having my parents educated. I think having my dad, my Indigenous side, my dad, having an education was a big part for me. He always strived to want me to be able to do better than he did. As a father, I guess, you always want to push - you want your kids to grow up and become a better person, or something like that. Yeah, I think my dad having an education, and his mum, and then his nanna having an education.*
>
> (18-30, Alice Springs, studying undergraduate)

The potential to improve health and wellbeing in communities was also a salient influence for pursuing higher education:

> *One of the things that was probably driving me to achieve in those first few years at uni was, having this dream of going back to where I grew up or where my mother and father grew up to help address some of the issues out there, and playing more of a medical role in that in being a doctor in these rural and regional communities. So that was something that I sort of used to feel my drive at that point, to be in a position where I could then help people out there.*
>
> (18-30, Brisbane, studying master degree)

3.1.3 Influence and mentorship

Participants saw obtaining qualifications as an opportunity to mentor others and influence changes in their community, citing legal and health challenges as crucial topics of interest. Successful university students helped remove engagement barriers, demystifying university for other Indigenous males.

Opportunities to influence social and health changes in communities were a powerful motivation to attain a higher qualification. Participants often had direct connections to family and community members who were suffering from ill-health or who had experienced incarceration.

Well, a lot of what I'm doing that's all related to Indigenous health. So, because I've been working in the area and I'm quite passionate and also my mum passed away of cancer when I was 19 so that led me into getting into some of this area.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

I don't know the stats - but it's pretty awful and working at the courts…and you see your mob come in and you're like you just want to help them out and I just remember thinking, when I was told that I could get a law degree, I just thought, 'Oh yeah, that's me then, I've got to do that'. That's how I felt. And that's how I started the degree. I never thought I would ever go to uni; uni was not even a thing for me. I didn't even read a full book in high school.

(age unknown, Darwin, studying undergraduate degree)

Participants defined mentorship as a role to guide people through the turbulence of life and as an opportunity to share knowledge.

My whole journey on studying to be a teacher and be a person, I guess, to just - it's pretty much devoted to just helping people and helping people cope through life because it's ever changing and ever fantastic sometimes. Just to be a guiding mentor hopefully, for people that I can help and teach them history along the way.

(18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

Discussion with other males illustrated flexible study structures often removing engagement barriers:

I'm like, 'Well I've got this one-hour class here, and I can watch this lecture whenever I want'. And they're wowed by that, that that's all I have to do. It sort of lowers that barrier to entry and sort of makes them think about how they could fit that into their life.

(18-30, Bendigo, studying undergraduate)

Higher education attainment positioned Indigenous males as role models for others, potentially increasing future pathways for family and community members.

I knew that I was capable of studying at uni. And I kind of wanted to also prove to the people in my own community and mostly I tell my brothers that it can be done.

(age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

3.1.4 Increased life and career opportunities

Opportunities to view challenges from a macro perspective through study increased access to employment and participants' ability to drive positive changes in their lives.

Increased knowledge allowed students to view community challenges from a broader perspective increasing their opportunities to make improvements:

You might want to change things as a health worker but then you've got to have a look at big picture things, to make changes you require that you need further studies. You've got to be part of the change making processes as well too, so there's a lot of things. And also having the studies and degrees can help you get into other jobs that you make these changes as well too, which helped me get into Menzies with some of my background.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

Degrees that had clear pathways to a career, with high levels of employability, were favoured by participants:

> *I picked it [degree] because I see that as a straight line to a career. Like I study OT [Occupational Therapy], I can become an OT. Whereas people that study sport science, or stuff like that, there's not a - I didn't want to get my degree, and then struggle to find a job. Or still be in the dark on what I want to do exactly. That's why I originally liked physio, and then in turn, OT.*
>
> (18-30, Melbourne, studying undergraduate)

Participants acknowledged the need to acquire diverse skill sets that were aligned with their qualification, given the competitiveness of current job markets:

> *It [higher education] allows you to be competitive in this economic market. For example, my skills are transferrable to almost every industry, so it'll allow me to expand and be able to work in a bunch of different areas, comparatively to someone around here that doesn't have those same skills that I have.*
>
> (18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

Job losses, and workforce shortages, particularly amidst COVID-19, increased the value of opportunities created through the completion of qualifications. As such, higher education qualifications were considered a buffer against risks associated with unemployment:

> *I think now looking at it, I think everyone should go to uni. Especially in the current climate, there's job loss going around everywhere. There are people with law degrees trying to get jobs at Target. You know what I mean? You need some sort of paper, everything is about paper these days. Like it's good that you have 20 years of experience, but if you have a degree, like it puts you above the rest kind of thing.*
>
> (18-30, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

Some participants indicated that professional progression could be stymied without qualification or specialised skillsets, so students expected increased freedom and flexibility after completing their degree:

> *I wanted to have a degree. It wasn't until later on in life when I realised that what - I need a degree. You get to a certain point and you can't go anywhere higher. You can't jump into the field that you're really passionate about, so a degree for me is freedom and it's also about doing the work that I want to do, yeah.*
>
> (30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

> *University would help me in understanding the required techniques or algorithms that the industry uses that enable me to sort of spread my horizons I guess.*
>
> (18-30, Perth, studying undergraduate)

3.1.5 Representation of Indigenous perspectives and experiences of higher education

Participants identified the importance of integrating Indigenous perspectives and experiences into professional work, theories, and study, particularly highlighting examples of potential improvements for psychological theory and educational pedagogy:

> *I just know that my purpose is to help embed Indigenous perspectives more in education and in the classroom, I feel like that's my passion and that's my*

purpose, is having our people and our culture and our history represented more in the Education curriculum.

(age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

With psychology there aren't really many males studying. Even just as a male, I'll definitely add something to that being Aboriginal as well or being the only Aboriginal student. So, in my cohort, I guess whenever those issues come up, or whenever anyone's wants to talk about psychology from more of an Aboriginal perspective, then I'm able to sort of share my knowledge and my experiences.

(age unknown, Brisbane)

3.1.6 Interest in the topic/field

Pursing a topic of interest appeared to support sustained study engagement and offered an alternative motivation to studying for financial purposes.

Not many Aboriginal males at university studying but if you're doing something you're passionate about, something you're interested in, you're going to find a way.

(18-30, Brisbane, studying master degree)

If I had to give a broad sort of answer it would be, to definitely do something that you're interested in. And you're passionate about don't just do it for the money or because you're expected to do it. Do something you're interested in.

(18-30, Brisbane, studying master degree)

The short-term financial hardship created through studying was often balanced against the longer-term gains of a personally, professionally, and financially fulfilling career:

I guess you can go off and get a job after you finish school and be on decent money, after a few years or so, but you might not be doing something you're totally passionate about or interested in. And I guess going to uni for a few more extra years, opens up a lot more opportunities in the future. So, I guess just being aware that there are going to be a few years there where it's going to be a bit of a struggle, but if you're doing something you're passionate about then that sacrifice is going to pay off in the long run.

(age unknown. Brisbane, attained undergraduate degree)

Study attempts aligned with a topic of interest also created sustainable engagement for many participants:

I just wanted to do courses that I just really enjoyed, because in my previous degree I was doing Civil Engineering and yeah. I was enjoying some, but not really enjoying a lot of the other courses. So this time I just wanted to do and just study things that I loved.

(18-30, Brisbane, studying undergraduate degree*)*

A major part was - it was this thought, "I'm actually interested in this stuff. I'm going to university. I'm going somewhere to learn and study something that I'm interested in." And therefore, there's more - if you want to say -there's more heart in it. I'm actually really applying myself.

(unknown, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

There are going to be a few years there where it's going to be a bit of a struggle, but if you're doing something you're passionate about then that sacrifice is going to pay off in the long run.

(18-30, Brisbane, studying master degree)

3.2 Factors influencing study engagement and success

3.2.1 Accessible, flexible courses, and online learning

Course structures and deadlines that were flexible, such as assignment extensions, supported students in their studies. In some instances, Indigenous student support services were instrumental in students accessing such flexibility:

I found this semester actually pretty enjoyable because I've had the free time to do my work whenever I want to rather than restricted to the class schedules.

(unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

I think [Wirltu Yarlu] they're called, they were helpful in saying, 'If he needed an extension, could he get one under these grounds?' and they helped me out with that really well in my first year, which was a good year for me with studying units. But yeah, there was definitely a good flexibility down there with that. It definitely helped me out at the start of the degree.

(unknown age, Darwin, unknown qualification)

Some universities also offered participants the freedom and independence to explore different subjects and ideas to determine which pathway they would pursue:

If you don't know where you want to be or you don't know what you want to try, it's perfect, because it [flexibility] allows you to try all of it.

(18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

In high school, you just expected to go along with what people tell you in maths and English, whatever's in this book is gospel. But in university, you've got the freedom to explore different perspectives and you can go and find out for yourself if you're on the right path or if it's not all - maybe the question hasn't even been asked yet.

(30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

This is particularly important regarding COVID and the new normal. Students reported increased flexibility through online courses allowing them to improve work-life balance, decrease transport time and structure their schedule to suit their needs:

I sort of found more as time went on, especially now because this semester has been entirely online, that like I can still work just as effectively if I need to skip class some days to do other stuff. Like because I found this semester actually pretty enjoyable because I've had the free time to do my work whenever I want to rather than restricted to the class schedules.

(unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

Several participants had successfully adapted to online learning during COVID-19 lockdowns reporting positive benefits for transport, work-life balance, and decreased stress:

But in some ways by working at home through my job and having to study at home actually it sort of helped a little bit because it meant I didn't have to do the

travel to and from work. I was finished work and at home so then I could - I wasn't getting home too late, so sometimes that helped a little bit.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

It's not the same hurdle now, because with everything being online with the stage four lockdown we have here in Melbourne, that's allowed me to take that time and the expense of being out and about running around and turn that back into my studies. And that's made a big, big impact. So it sounds silly, but I'm quite grateful for that. It makes a big difference.

(30-50, Melbourne, studying undergraduate)

Mindset played a notable role in participants' study persistence. Some participants commenced courses with a clear focus and high motivation levels, while some developed it further during their courses:

I've never had this quitting attitude for uni even though there's been so many times I've been like, 'No, this is it. I should just throw it away because it's taken me almost twice as long as it should'. There was a couple of units there I would fail and I'd be like, 'Come on, I can't fail it again, just work harder through it. And that stuff ends up working. It did work pushing through that hard time, whether it be studying by myself, or doing long nights just to get my head around things.

(unknown age, Darwin, unknown qualification)

I think a challenge for me was getting out of that mindset, where I was like, "Oh I'm doing well." doing the bare minimum. I wasn't really learning as much as I could from the subject. Trying to force myself out of that habit, and actively involve myself.

(18-30, Melbourne, studying undergraduate)

In some cases, participants used perceived failures to strengthen their mindset:

It wasn't until I failed twice, that my brain rewired itself to become so disciplined, that no matter what I do, I'm going to complete it.

(18-30, Perth, studying undergraduate)

3.2.2 Financial support and the importance of scholarships

In many instances, financial assistance (e.g., scholarships) from universities and other organisations supported participants in funding their studies and covering other personal expenses (e.g. renting accommodation), as they often had little financial support from their families:

I wanted to get more into research, but I guess part of the blockage was just I didn't have the funds to fund any further education from a couple of years back getting out of the debt of $60,000. So if it wasn't for the scholarship I wouldn't have been able to do it.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

Going down to Melbourne was a big move. I was also fortunate enough to land an accommodation scholarship. Without that, I definitely - I wouldn't have even been able to move down there.

(unknown, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

Without a scholarship, some participants entered a financial deficit, making completing their studies untenable. Receiving a scholarship was a pivotal moment in their journey to finish university.

> *I don't have any financial support from family at all. So if I wasn't able to afford it myself, I couldn't do it. At that particular time, my income versus my rent was - I was in a deficit every single week, so I never got to a surplus. As a result, it just put too much strain on me, I couldn't focus on uni, and I dropped out. This time round, I was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship. That's one of the big reasons I came to Canberra. I got the scholarship, and that helped me, confidence-wise, to alleviate any of the financial strains I knew I was going to encounter.*
>
> (18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

Obtaining a scholarship and living independently also taught students budgeting skills.

> *I was fortunate to have that scholarship. I didn't have to find work. What was the biggest part was actually getting that money from the scholarship and using it wisely and actually budgeting, which I didn't have any of those skills at the time.*
>
> (age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

3.2.3 Role models

Students attributed their motivation to study to many community members over several points in their journey, highlighting that the cumulative advice from diverse people, in different fields, is critical to initiate and sustain a journey into and through higher education:

> *Connect with your mentors, and the people that are there to support you. And if you're ever stuck, always ask questions.*
>
> (18-30, Perth, studying undergraduate)

> *As you go through your high school, you meet people along the way who have an impact on your life and university would certainly be partially attributed to him including just about every teacher I've had and most of the people that I've met in life through sports, through education, through social gatherings. I don't think it's just one person. I think it's the whole heap of people coming together in your life at different points and getting your path towards whatever it is that you want to go and do. My one - I'm just lucky to be surrounded by people that push me through university, that push me to go in the first place.*
>
> (30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

Peers and family members, particularly other males, who achieved success at university often encouraged Indigenous males, both implicitly and explicitly, to sustain and complete their studies:

> *We had a really, really prominent Indigenous male student recently. I've lost track of him. His name was *name redacted*, studied law, and I believe he went onto do business. But I remember before I actually got the chance to catch up with him at uni and have a chat to him, he was doing some pretty incredible things through uni, going overseas, participating in legal conventions and the sorts overseas and I think that to me was a really powerful message that, there are all these opportunities out there, you just need to go and take them.*
>
> (30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

If I was looking at the family of origin, having a father. A positive sort of role model who went to university himself definitely, helped me out a lot. For him to be able to model that direction in life.

(18-30, Brisbane, studying master degree)

Teachers also played a pivotal role in identifying opportunities and pathways to university for participants:

*My school teacher, *name redacted*, who was the head of outdoor ed, and still is the head of outdoor ed, was the biggest part of my choice for university, and for whatever course I was going to choose. I just found him very influential upon myself. I related really well, and overall, he just made me enjoy and love going to class. That part, that was the biggest part for me, was seeing his passion for it. And I guess, yeah, it rubbed off with me there, pretty much. I just thought, from even since that point, I just wanted to do outdoor ed, really.*

(18-30, Alice Springs, studying undergraduate)

*There was definitely a teacher at the school, *name redacted*, who ran this tutoring program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait [Islander] only students, at the school. And he was someone who was very motivating for me and gave me a lot of good advice and really encouraged me to pursue that and to do as well as I could in school. So I feel like he was a very key influence over me going down that direction to university.*

(18-30, Brisbane, studying master degree)

Yeah, it was in grade 10 when I had, they were actually substitute teachers and they were both older Indigenous women from the area. And they basically sort of ran the Indigenous Support Unit within that school there. And they heard of these opportunities of these summer camps to university. And they said, "Yeah, [named redacted], we think you should definitely attend those. We can see the potential in you." And I was like, "Oh, okay, yo, give it a go." Yeah, I loved them. And that was kind of the start I guess, of that first experience of uni and I guess, falling in love with it.

(age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

3.2.4 Indigenous Support Units at universities

The importance of the Indigenous Support Units at universities was clearly highlighted by most participants. The Units contributed to participants' increased access to universities as well as success, retention, completion, and satisfaction within a university environment. This support was very well-regarded by participants particularly in the context of an otherwise often unwelcoming campus and frequent isolation, exacerbated by travel. These Units were also seen as important to recruitment, both through familial and historical networks, and through the inherent community work that support officers undertake, even though it was often not part of their formal role as 'support officers' for existing students.

I really appreciate the Ngunnawal Centre's help, especially in my first year, I kind of had no idea what I was doing at Uni a bit. The Ngunnawal Centre was a good place to go for focus and come to grasps, and it was a good place to study and hang out when I had free periods or free time.

(18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

So there was a lot of support from the Jimbeyer unit from the get-go, which helped significantly. Yeah, went to accommodation services, got my room key, all that

sort of stuff, and went to the Hillside Apartments, which is where I'm staying. Yeah, it was good. The people in there that was already living there from the start, were very friendly, very good, so I got along really well.

(18-30, Alice Springs, studying undergraduate)

It was always hard for me because I came from such a small town so far up North. I just didn't know anyone getting down here. And it was pretty hard. I found it a lot easier to form relationships at the ATSIS unit more so than within my degree and in my classes. But yeah, I still just found it hard just being so far away from home and not knowing anyone.

(Age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

3.2.5 Routines and schedules

University structures and routines supported participants to attend classes and meet deadlines. Study plans were essential in allowing students the flexibility to meet their deadlines:

You get into your routine, you get your patterns, and it's the same with school. You've got your timetable, pretty much your classes are here, here and here. You've got your homework to do, yeah, it's just a bigger version of school, basically, I found. Putting it in that perspective helped me a lot.

(18-30, Alice Springs, studying undergraduate)

One of the biggest supportive mechanisms that's allowed me to overcome this to the point where I have is the RAP [Reconciliation Action Plan], the RAP plan that was put in place by the university that allowed me to negotiate timelines for my assignments. That's been massive, because there has been a lot of times when the days would arise that an assignment was due and I'd partially completed it, but I'd needed a mental health day because I would trigger, for example. And so, that was immensely helpful, and just using university as my escape, per se.

(18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

3.2.6 Workplace training and support

Work colleagues provided mentorship and study advice to participants through their field of expertise, and sometimes allowed them time away from work to study:

Our team leaders and managers [workplace] were very supportive of the program [diploma], gave us the time to do it when we needed to commit to it and so, over the time, I think it was the people involved in the actual program that were the most supportive and the informal supports such as the trainers, the facilitators and the team leaders and managers were on board as well.

(30-50, Darwin, achieved diploma)

I never really went the official route with study. I could've utilised it, but what I found was there were people in the workplace who were really good at mentoring. They knew a lot about psychology. They'd been in psychology for a number of years and any time I had a question, they were more than happy to sit down and have a chat and explain different theories to me and how they all work.

(30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

3.3 Barriers to engaging with university

3.3.1 Adjustment to a different environment or worldview

Indigenous males often felt a sense of disconnection from the city, the universities and their peers, leading to feelings of isolation and a longing for home. One student reflected on how they felt a loss of identity in the culture of Western institutions:

> *When you come into these institutions [universities], honestly these Western institutions, they can really make you lose a sense of your identity and who you are and it's not always on purpose but when you come here, sometimes you can just sort of put that stuff in the background to try and fit in, I guess.*
>
> (age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

> *I probably get most of my thoughts from, is from growing up in the Territory, away, in the area where a lot of people, say from Victoria, New South Wales, just haven't experienced that other world that we are from. I use another world sort of analogy quite a lot, because it is significantly different. I think it's because a lot of the parents aren't educated from the beginning. Some of the kids might not even know what university is, to be honest.*
>
> (18-30, Alice Springs, studying undergraduate)

Participants often felt socially isolated from their peers and academic staff due to cultural differences, People's hesitancy to engage with Indigenous students amplified the feeling of being an outsider:

> *There are lots of cultural differences too for me walking onto campus, and maybe that's a lot more to do with my unique circumstance as well. But I really feel like a fish out of water there. I'm not one of the group. I don't fit in in quite the same way with other students. But I think many Indigenous students probably feel the same.*
>
> (30-50, Melbourne, studying undergraduate)

> *I'm a little bit different culturally to the academic staff as well. And they seem almost as nervous, if not more nervous, around me than I might be around them. And they keep their distance. So you can be left feeling like you're the only one there in a room full of 30 odd students. So that can be isolating.*
>
> (30-50, Melbourne, studying undergraduate)

Participants often viewed university as a foreign place, identifying that Western institutions rarely make concessions preferring to draw students to the city and another way of life rather than meeting them in their place:

> *When it comes to teaching Indigenous people to the academic world, it's all about, "All right. You come to us. You come to [university name] in Melbourne. You come to that, that, that. We'll offer scholarships. We'll offer all these things that will help you study. But you need to come to us." I think there should be more projects where it's we can come to you.*
>
> (30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

Occasionally, larger cities were also daunting to participants making interstate transitions to attend university:

> *I couldn't adapt into Melbourne lifestyle after growing up in Darwin my whole life. I loved the uni down there, it was awesome. Met some great people. But just the size of the city and the amount of people. As I spoke, I touched on before, it felt*

culturally not from an Indigenous standpoint just, but just even social wise, it just felt not quite right.

(30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

3.3.2 Pursuing alternative career pathways

As expressed by participants, many Indigenous males are initially drawn to other attractive careers, but some returned to academia through an inter-related degree.

You've got the potential of earning say four hundred and fifty dollars a week as an apprentice, you know that's massive at sixteen. And you think that's fantastic. And then you realise that hang on your ceiling is relatively low and you're being told that that's the path that you need to go down, rather than university even being an option. And then I sort of had to fight to find that option.

(18-30, Bendigo, studying undergraduate)

For a lot of Aboriginal people [they] often want to be football players but then the dream doesn't come to reality in the end. And football's not a career that can last all your life. But I don't discourage it either, sports is quite good, but you could potentially get in with some sort of sports apart from just doing the footy by itself you could link it in with the research, your education component linked into it, so you're not just doing sports and then your career's over. You build up a career pathway in research or some sort of connected area or sports psychology or something like that type of thing.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

3.3.3 Awareness, promotion, and understanding of university

A common barrier to engaging with a university course was a lack of university promotion or available information to Indigenous males:

I didn't really come from families where university was like this. I didn't really, even know my mother and father went there, it wasn't really something that we placed a whole lot of emphasis on growing up and it wasn't, I guess yeah, something I knew a whole lot about going in.

(18-30, Brisbane, studying master degree)

*I also, if I didn't meet *name redacted* [School Indigenous Liaison Officer], I don't think I'd be in this position. And there wasn't much information out there as well, to think that university isn't just this big, grand thing - and I can do it, I just need to put my mind to it.*

(18-30, Perth, studying undergraduate)

An increased understanding of university helped to demystify what it was all about for some Indigenous males, subsequently increasing their engagement with courses.

I had no idea until I even signed up what university structure really was. So I think bridging that gap and just getting the knowledge there that university isn't as hard.

(18-30, Bendigo, studying undergraduate)

3.3.4 Academic preparation and expectations through school

Some participants reported being ill prepared for university due to a lack of literacy and numeracy skills:

You know it's probably the big two, numeracy and literacy. The minute that you can't do one of those things you're seen as dumb and then you're cast out very early on, and then it's almost a fight back just to get to baseline where everyone else is in making that jump to university. Because most people start with they can choose to go to university or TAFE very early on. It's their choice to make. And I think for us, we are sort of - you're going to TAFE if you want to do something and you need to make that next leap and fight and claw to get to university.

(18-30, Bendigo, studying undergraduate)

Other students reported low expectations in relation to academic achievement as a barrier:

A lot of them [Indigenous males] just perceive themselves as not being smart enough as well, when you talk to them at school. And that's the thing, you are smart enough to be able to go to uni. Everyone can go to uni, and there's the support for you when you need it.

(18-30, Alice Springs, studying undergraduate)

3.3.5 Financial constraints

Indigenous males often hold the 'breadwinner' role in their families, increasing pressure to get a job and to provide for the family in the short term. This can make it challenging to invest in longer-term education pathways:

I guess it's depending on your family structure as well. So, if you are perceived as being the financial support of your family, then you're not too worried about getting a qualification or a higher degree, your work is based on commitment to your family and providing for your family. (30-50, Darwin, achieved diploma).

Aboriginal males, when they leave school, having the need to just get a job straight away to start in and earn money. That may have came from backgrounds that were lower sort of socioeconomic and they could understand the value in having money and being able to earn it from an early age.

(18-30, Brisbane, studying master degree)

Financial instability seriously impacted many participants during their studies, creating under-resourcing as they struggled to afford study materials, which often added additional costs.

When I first started uni I couldn't even afford a laptop so I'd have to sit in coffee shops in one of those computer things that were coffee shops, what is $1 for half an hour. So that was really full on.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

Students emphasised the short-term financial risks of continuing study, sometimes leaving the course due to the stresses of covering rent and other household expenses.

Trying to be independent in regards to having a gym membership, going to the gym, having enough money for food so that I can have a routine and that I can make my own meals and not eat garbage so that it effects the way my brain functions, just really simple things like that. They can be challenging sometimes as well.

(18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

How am I going to make the rent this week and how am I going to afford to do the shopping, that sort of thing.

(30-50, Melbourne, studying undergraduate)

There was a salient risk of incurring a lifelong debt for participants, a significant disincentive to commencing or continuing study:

Yeah, well for me I had accumulated $60,000 worth of debt so my university studies that I did in the '90s I had accumulated a total debt of $30,000, so I had to pay that back. So all the HECS and supplementary loans, so paying all that back $30,000 and then I had $30,000 of credit card debts, so a total debt of $60K and I thought well I'm going to be broke for the rest of my life, so it just meant on top of trying to pay your car bills, your rent, you have very little money left.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

So many employers from all these different industries want Indigenous people, but the thing stopping them now is literally just the HECS debt and the future fees that they may have to come. And that could be the difference of going to university or not going to university.

(18-30, Perth, studying undergraduate)

For participants that moved interstate for university, they often couldn't afford to return home, to be closer to family and Country. This was considered important, a place that they viewed as a retreat from the foreign atmosphere of university:

When I left college and I had to go and find my own place. I didn't have the money to fly home as regularly as I could. Those times I definitely struggled a lot more.

(Age unknown, Brisbane, studying undergraduate)

3.3.6 Transportation

Access and cost of transportation created an additional financial burden and time impediment for participants, particularly in regional areas:

Transport issues can be a big, big thing for other people as well, and if you're in a regional area, the public transport is not as good as it might be in Melbourne. And that's not necessarily saying is world-best leader in public transport either. Then you have to travel by car. There is no way around it. And that's an incredible expense.

(30-50, Melbourne, studying undergraduate)

So I guess before it was 9 to 5 I could go to uni and come home like people do, but now I've got to work and unfortunately my car's been off the road three months. So for example getting here this morning I had to wake up at 5:30 in the morning and get three buses to get here, and then three buses back. So it's - and then go home and study.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

3.4 Barriers to completing university

3.4.1 COVID-19 disruptions to study

Although several participants reported on the benefits of online learning during COVID-19, others were aware of hardships experienced by their classmates that remained on campus:

> *Hearing the stories from other people that stayed here on campus, or were in the lockdowns in metropolitan, it was a lot different and a lot tougher.*
>
> (18-30, Alice Springs, studying undergraduate)

One participant noted the uncertainty about continuity of teaching and learning at university as a barrier to sustained engagement in higher education, with COVID-19 exacerbating uncertainty for new students that were less familiar with university processes and ways of working:

> *A fear of the unknown - for myself going into university for the first time, it was a massive unknown. I was freaking out about uni, but I can't imagine somebody fresh coming into uni this year with corona virus as well. That'd just blow me away.*
>
> (30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

Participants found it challenging to complete coursework online in some fields, needing in-person assistance from academic staff.

> *I mean one of the personal impacts for myself was probably just having to drop my math unit. I can't do math online. It just doesn't work out for me. I've always needed say a tutor to sit beside me and just show me sort of what to do, the different ways to do it*
>
> (18-30, Perth, studying undergraduate)

3.4.2 Work-life study balance

Higher education was often balanced with other life and work commitments. Participants again reported the benefits of overlapping work and study commitments (see workplace training and support):

> *I think the work-life balance and work committing to the support as well because at times, you're trying to juggle it after hours, on the weekends. If it's managed throughout the day-to-day, I think that really helped me because when I did the diploma, it was connected to work.*
>
> (30-50, Darwin, achieved diploma)

Transitioning to higher education created study scheduling challenges for participants who weren't necessarily used to creating and managing their own routines:

> *I do find it hard to sit down and study, I do get - I procrastinate a lot, but I think I also - I think it's been solely up to me to make my own study schedule. So, there's been no real support to show me skills in life to sit down and just get things done. It's just been for me - it's been up to me to sort of just go round and try things.*
>
> (18-30, Canberra, studying undergraduate)

Participant responses indicated that there were occasional tensions between having freedom and independence to develop their own schedules, in contrast to more prescriptive university schedules:

In this respect, freedom was a bad thing. I was used to having rules, having to be at places, to go and do certain assignments, but when you're doing it on own back, it's so - you can get caught up in different things.

(30-50, Darwin, studying undergraduate)

Sometimes tutorial times could be inconvenient, particularly in relation to juggling with work commitments, ultimately making it difficult for participants to manage work and study responsibilities:

I guess when I first started at uni too it was - the classes were from 6pm to 9pm and then you get home about 11pm - no 9pm, it was about 10pm and then you had to start study at 10pm. So it was all a bit challenging trying to work and study.

(50+, Darwin, studying graduate certificate)

Chapter 4: Discussion and recommendations

This report is predicated on a need for increased information about Indigenous males' aspirations for, and participation in, higher education, including motivating factors that engage and sustain their study. The findings of this research complement existing literature on higher education engagement for Indigenous people and start to contribute to gender-specific perspectives to increase Indigenous males' representation in higher education.

By collating participant perspectives on supports such as community, family, and culture, this report provides a holistic understanding of how higher education might increase inclusion by removing barriers, and sustaining students' engagement by emphasising factors that promote participation, enhance financial security, and increase cultural safety and responsiveness.

4.1 Promotion of programs and role models - higher education institutions

Findings highlighted the importance of family and community experiences of higher education as a catalyst for Indigenous males to begin and sustain higher education study. Participants identified a need to demystify institutes and study structures, often citing role models and program promotion as essential points, a reference to clarify concerns. Therefore, it is recommended that universities and bridging courses highlight Indigenous community members, current students and alumni (particularly males) as role models, sharing their education stories in resources and promotional campaigns aimed at attracting and retaining Indigenous males in higher education. These resources and campaigns could be promoted through high schools, vocational education training settings, Indigenous support units on campuses, sports clubs and community networks, illuminating education, and career pathways for potential students at critical life junctures.

Participants identified that opportunities to influence change in their communities were also key motivating factors for enrolling and participating in university. Therefore, there is an opportunity to promote diploma and degree pathways perceived as providing localised support for the communities in which Indigenous males live or belong. This seems particularly relevant for health and community service sectors, where Indigenous males have historically been under-represented. Indigenous male students were more likely to believe that their qualifications would improve welfare in their community compared to their non-Indigenous peers (Asmar et al., 2015). Highlighting the potential for improved health, education, and welfare outcomes for Indigenous people, by supporting Indigenous males to obtain higher education qualifications in these fields is likely to have a greater impact than promoting prospective financial gain, which participants reported as being less influential.

4.2 Online courses- higher education institutions

A major barrier for Indigenous men to engage in study was the requirement to relocate, leave family and community, and adapt to a worldview and environment that many found foreign and, in some instances, culturally unsafe. Higher education institutions seek to bring students into their domain, a process that is often unsettling and creates a sense of disconnection and loneliness. Efforts to decolonise and Indigenise universities as safe and supportive environments, where Indigenous masculinities can be valued, are particularly important to better support Indigenous males.

As reported by participants in this study, the rise of online courses during COVID-19 positively improved work-life balance, reduced transportation time, and decreased stress. Increased offerings of online courses could allow students in remote locations to stay in their community and Country with family, improving social and emotional wellbeing, and

potentially reducing the financial burden of relocating or renting. However, it is also important for universities to offer additional pastoral and academic supports in tandem to prevent feelings of isolation and disconnection.

There is a need for government grants for libraries and community centres in remote locations to provide computers, books and other study materials designed to increase higher education awareness, computer literacy and ultimately participation in online university courses. Universities could offer in-kind contributions to these communal spaces, providing free classes, equipment, and resources to simultaneously build relationships while improving higher education awareness and engagement (Hossain et al., 2008). Similarly, scholarships to support IT infrastructure such as the purchase of laptops and internet access, would also be beneficial.

Further research is needed to fully understand Indigenous males' perceptions of online learning as broad findings from Australian undergraduate students reported adverse mental health and wellbeing impacts stemming from online courses (Dodd et al., 2021). We already know that maintaining connection to culture and Country is important for promoting pathways into higher education for Indigenous students, particularly those in regional ad remote locations (Smith et al, 2018). Further research with Indigenous males examining the potential positive mental health and wellbeing benefits of remaining connected to Country, community, and family through the provision of online education and support options, and how these might offset feelings of disconnection and isolation experienced by an inability to engage in face-to-face learning, is required.

Some higher education courses are not well suited to online learning, so face-to-face options may still be preferred in many cases (Mullen et al., 2021; Seymour-Walsh et al., 2020). The provision of Indigenous mentors and study programs both on campus and online to support students could potentially reduce the feeling of alienation that Indigenous males discussed in the results.

4.3 Financial support- higher education institutions and government scholarship funding bodies

Scholarships providing for course fees and living expenses are vital entry factors to higher education for Indigenous males who may also experience cumulative equity impacts, such as remoteness, and lower socio-economic status (Barney, 2013). Relocation scholarships should be expanded to allow remote Indigenous men to travel back to communities to connect with protective factors such as culture, community, family and Country (Department of Social Services, 2021). Previous scholarship has shown that financial challenges were the most prominent reason Indigenous students considered leaving their program (at almost twice the rate of non-Indigenous peers; Asmar et al., 2015). Our participants expressed gratitude for scholarships focused on tuition fees, accommodation, and IT support, so such supports should be expanded.

4.4 Limitations and future research

The study conducted narrative interviews with fewer participants than initially anticipated. However, data saturation was achieved with no instances of novel codes emerging in the final transcripts. This study included Indigenous males of different ages from geographically diverse Australian regions (five jurisdictions). As such, it only provides an initial snapshot of Indigenous male aspirations and achievement in higher education. Further research is needed, including participants from Tasmania, New South Wales and Torres Strait Islander regions to better represent the culturally, linguistically and geographically diverse perspectives of Indigenous males across Australia. All study participants had already commenced or completed their degrees, so findings are unlikely to represent those still contemplating study, and further work of this nature with high school aged Indigenous males

as well as males within the community who are contemplating university study would be beneficial. As qualitative research focuses on in-depth interpretations of findings within specific demographics and phenomena, generalisability was not expected of this study (Carminati, 2018; Leung, 2015). It is also important that heterogeneity of this population is celebrated. A deeper examination of the impact of gender, more specifically the social construction of masculinities among Indigenous males, and its intersection with age, culture, and higher education, is warranted in subsequent analyses and future research.

Future research incorporating perspectives from Indigenous males in secondary school is also imperative to represent a broader array of views, including those that may be reluctant to engage in higher education or those at risk of disengaging from education. This would help to understand additional challenges and opportunities associated with career and education pathways associated with direct transitions from high school to university.

Indigenous males are far more likely to enrol in Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses than university. This is likely because of perceptions about earnings, especially, short-term; family responsibilities; and academic preparedness, as discussed by participants. Universities could partly address this issue by reinforcing the lifetime financial benefits of a university education versus the short-term financial rewards of work/apprenticeships. The findings also suggest that universities need to focus on Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathways, and articulation mapping into university courses. In addition, university outreach and recruitment efforts, should also be directed towards the VET sector rather than being focused overwhelmingly on secondary school participation and completion (Smith et al., 2017).

One of the barriers to participate in higher education as described by participants was a lack of confidence (or not being “smart enough” in participants’ words) that they could successfully complete a university degree. Therefore, universities may need additional marketing efforts focused at encouraging Indigenous males to better realise and accept their education potential.

Further research conducted with family and community members that have supported Indigenous male students to engage in higher education would also help to unpack the intergenerational influences on higher education pathways. Future research should investigate the stories of Indigenous males who do not attend university but who achieve success and life goals. Such research will provide a comprehensive picture of success and thriving among Indigenous males in Australia. This report provides a preliminary exploration of Indigenous males’ participation and success in higher education; however, further research is needed, including a broader range of perspectives to understand the complex, holistic factors impacting Indigenous males’ higher education engagement.

4.5 Recommendations

Higher education institutions can:

- Acknowledge the under-representation of Indigenous males in higher education and prioritise targeted education and social supports
- Work towards building an evidence base about strategies that better support Indigenous males to navigate the intersections between and cumulative impacts of gender, age, and culture.
- Expand targeted scholarship and program supports for Indigenous male students to support their transition into and sustained participation within university. These should include supports for study materials, travel (particularly for students living away from home) and social supports that improve their health and wellbeing.

- Provide free classes, equipment, and resources to remote community centres and libraries to simultaneously build community relationships, and improve higher education awareness and engagement.
- Promote the stories of current Indigenous students, community members and alumni in promotional campaigns aimed at attracting and retaining Indigenous males in higher education.
- Expand the number of Indigenous study mentors (particularly male mentors) and programs on campus to provide academic support and to reduce feelings of alienation that Indigenous male students may face.

Governments and funding bodies can:

- Identify Indigenous males as a priority (sub)population in higher education policy and program settings at a national level
- Fund higher education instutitions to develop and implement targeted programs and services for Indigenous males,, including those: (a) aspiring to pursue higher education; and (b) currently participating in higher education.
- Invest more heavily in travel scholarships to support students to return home during semester breaks.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethics approval

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Ethics Administration Office
File Reference Number: HREC-2019-3531
Phone: (08) 8946 8687 or (08) 8946 8692
Email: ethics@menzies.edu.au

11 November 2019

Professor James Smith
Wellbeing and Preventable Chronic Diseases Division
Menzies School of Health Research
PO Box 41096
Casuarina NT 0810

Dear Professor Smith,

HREC Reference Number: 2019-3531
Project Title: *Higher Education Aspirations, Participation and Achievement of Australian Indigenous Males*

Thank you for letter dated 06/11/2019 and taking the time to respond to the issues of concern identified by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Northern Territory Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research (HREC) at its meeting held on the 30/10/2019.

This project was considered by the HREC and the Aboriginal Ethics Sub-Committee (AESC), and assessed against guidelines for human research including the NHMRC *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007*.

I am pleased to advise that **full ethical approval** of this research project has been granted following assessment by representatives of both the AESC and the HREC. Please note that approval applies only to research conducted after the date of this letter and continued approval is dependent on annual reporting.

Approval Date: *11/11/2019*

Approval is granted for the above research project until the next report due date.

Annual progress report due: *31/12/2020*

Approved timeframe (subject to compliance and annual reporting): *11/11/2019 – 31/12/2020*

The nominated sites/s participating in this project that have been approved by this HREC is/are:

- **To be determined – please advise the HREC of site selection/s**

Please note that this HREC cannot approve sites in Central Australia or other States and Territories, and local site-specific ethics approval should be sought.

The documents listed below are approved:

Document	Version	Date
Recruitment Protocol	-	08/10/2019
Interview Schedule	-	08/10/2019
Participant Information Sheets	-	06/11/2019
Participant Consent Forms	-	06/11/2019

The documents listed below are noted:

Document	Version	Date
CV Principal Investigator	-	08/10/2019
Email Correspondence	-	08/10/2019
Letter of Support from Charles Darwin University Office of Indigenous Student Services	-	08/10/2019
Draft MOU	-	08/10/2019

APPROVAL IS SUBJECT TO the following conditions being met:

1. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will **immediately report anything that might warrant review** of ethical approval of the project.

2. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Northern Territory Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research (HREC) of any event that requires a **modification or amendment to the protocol or other project documents** and submit any required amendments in accordance with the instructions provided by the HREC. These instructions can be found on the Menzies' website.

3. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will submit any necessary reports related to the **safety of research participants (e.g. protocol deviations, protocol violations)** in accordance with the HREC's policy and procedures. These guidelines can be found on the Menzies' website.

4. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will **report** to the HREC **annually** and notify the HREC when the project is completed at all sites using the specified forms. Forms and instructions may be found on the Menzies' website.

5. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the HREC if the project is **discontinued at a participating site before the expected completion date**, and provide the reason/s for discontinuance.

6. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the HREC of any plan to **extend the duration of the project past the approval period listed above** and will submit any associated required documentation. The preferred time and method of requesting an extension of ethical approval is during the **annual progress report**. However, an extension may be requested at any time.

7. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the HREC of his or her **inability to continue as Coordinating Principal Investigator**, including the name of and contact information for a replacement.

8. The safe and ethical conduct of this project is entirely the responsibility of the investigators and their institution(s).

9. Researchers should immediately report anything which might affect continuing ethical acceptance of the project, including:

    - Adverse effects of the project on participants and the steps taken to deal with these;
    - Other unforeseen events;
    - New information that may invalidate the ethical integrity of the study; and
    - Proposed changes in the project.

10. Approval for a further twelve months, within the original proposed timeframe, will be granted upon receipt of an annual progress report if the HREC is satisfied that the conduct of the project has been consistent with the approved protocol. Report templates are available on the Menzies ethics webpage.

11. Confidentiality of research participants should be maintained at all times as required by law.

12. The Patient Information Sheet and the Consent Form shall be printed on the relevant site letterhead with full contact details.

13. The Patient Information Sheet must provide a brief outline of the research activity including: risks and benefits, withdrawal options, contact details of the researchers and must also state that the Human Research Ethics Administrators can be contacted (telephone and email) for information concerning policies, rights of participants, concerns or complaints regarding the ethical conduct of the study.

14. You must forward a copy of this letter to all Investigators and to your institution (if applicable).

This letter constitutes ethical approval only. This project, including amendments to the research protocol or conduct of the research which may affect the site acceptability of the project, cannot proceed at any site until separate research governance authorisation has been obtained from the CEO or Delegate of the institution under whose auspices the research will be conducted at that site, if not already obtained.

Should you wish to discuss the above research project further, please contact the Ethics Administrators via email: ethics@menzies.edu.au or telephone: (08) 8946 8687 or (08) 8946 8686.

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Northern Territory Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research wishes you every continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Lewis Campbell
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee
of the Northern Territory Department of Health
and Menzies School of Health Research
http://www.menzies.edu.au/ethics

This HREC is registered with the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and operates in accordance with the NHMRC *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. NHMRC Reg no. EC00153

menzies.edu.au

Appendix B – Participant information sheet

Higher Education Aspirations, Participation and Achievement of Australian Indigenous males

INFORMATION SHEET

This is yours to keep.

What is the project about?

This study aims to examine the links between cultural identity and gender among Indigenous males to better understand:

- the higher education aspirations of Indigenous males; and
- the critical success factors and influences that have supported Indigenous males to thrive and achieve in higher education.

You have been identified as a potential stakeholder that can contribute to this study. As such, you are being invited to participate in the recording of a vignette (edited video clip).

Who is completing the research?

The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education has funded Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) to lead this project. The research team also includes representatives from Edith Cowan University (ECU), University of Queensland (UQ), Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), University of Canberra (UC), La Trobe University (LTU), and Murdoch University (MU).

This project involves both Indigenous and non-Indigenous investigators. Co-Lead Investigators include Professor James Smith (MSHR), and Mr Jesse Fleay (ECU). Other investigators include Professor Braden Hill (ECU), Dr Garth Stahl (UQ), Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney (UniSA), Professor Steven Larkin (BIITE), Dr Himanshu Gupta (Menzies), Professor Peter Radoll (UC), Associate Professor Andrew Harvey (LTU), Professor Dennis McDermott (LTU), Dr Rebecca Bennett (MU), Dr Bep Uink (MU), Mr Ben Christie (Menzies), and Mr Anthony Merlino (Menzies).

What will the project do?

This research will identify and celebrate the critical success factors (influences) among current/recent Indigenous male higher education students and alumni (of any age) to better inform the development and implementation of strategies to attract and retain the engagement of Indigenous males in university. This will help to develop strategies that can be used by Indigenous student services staff and equity practitioners in higher education settings across Australia to increase the higher education participation and completion rates of Indigenous males.

How will the project be completed?

This research will be conducted across five jurisdictions: Queensland (QLD), the Northern Territory (NT), Western Australia (WA), Victoria (Vic), and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The vignette component will involve video-recording an interview with you over Zoom. You will be asked questions about your higher education journey and what you consider to be the most important factors that have influenced that journey. You will also be asked about what advice you would give to other young Indigenous males considering higher education. The interviews will be edited into vignettes, which are expected to last approximately 5-8

minutes each. All vignettes will be uploaded onto participating university YouTube channels and will be publicly accessible.

It is envisaged these vignettes could be used by the participating universities (and potentially other universities) in school engagement and outreach activities promoting higher education, particularly those targeting young Indigenous males.

The research team will also review the content of the vignettes to identify success factors specific to young Indigenous males, which could be incorporated into outreach, enabling, recruitment and retention activities.

When will this project happen?

The research will occur between April 2019 and August 2020.

Benefits and Risks

The primary aim of this research is to better understand the higher education aspirations, participation and achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males. The information we collect will be helpful for planning and implementing better higher education outreach activities for Indigenous males. There are no specific risks to you or the community if you choose to give information in this research.

Use of your information

Some of the information you provide in the interviews will be publicly accessible on the YouTube accounts of participating universities, which means you will be identifiable. The information you provide may also be used in research papers, reports, presentations or to develop promotional education resources.

During this project, staff will take video clips. Please let them know if you don't want to be recorded or if you don't want your image used in a certain way.

Upon completion of the project, the vignettes and a final report with findings and recommendations will be available from the Menzies website.

Safety of your information

We will store recorded information in a safe and secure location at Menzies.

Who to contact?

If you have questions about this project, or about the information that you provide, please contact Professor James Smith (Co-Lead) on (08) 8946 8685 or Mr Jesse Fleay (Co-Lead) on (08) 6304 6015.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical conduct of the study, you are invited to contact Ethics Administration, Human Research Ethics Committee of the NT Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research on (08) 8946 8600 or email ethics@menzies.edu.au.

Appendix C – Consent form

Higher Education Aspirations, Participation and Achievement of Australian Indigenous males

CONSENT FORM

This means you can say no

I have talked to_____at _____about this project. I would like to be part of this project.
Please tick the boxes that you consent to:

- ☐ I understand what this project is about.
- ☐ I understand what is written on the Information Sheet.
- ☐ I am happy to participate in a video-recorded interview that will be edited and produced as a publicly available vignette.
- ☐ I am happy for people to take photos of me.
- ☐ I am happy for my words, photos, videos, or writing to be used in the project.
- ☐ I understand that I can choose not to answer questions or for information not to be recorded.
- ☐ I understand that I can pull out or withdraw information at any time before the vignettes are published.
- ☐ I am happy for the information that I provide during the interview as part of this project to be uploaded onto participating You Tube channels
- ☐ I understand that once the vignette has been uploaded onto You Tube it cannot be removed
- ☐ I understand that the information I provide made be used in future research projects relating to Indigenous health and education.
- ☐ I am happy for my information to be used in books, strategies, research proposals, reports, talks at workshops, seminars and conferences, journals, or on websites.
- ☐ I understand that my responses will be publicly available on the YouTube accounts of several universities and may be used for outreach and school engagement activities targeting young Indigenous students; and for the development of educational resources.

Signed: _____
Full name: _____
Date: _____
Witness signature: _____
Witness full name: _____
Date: _____

If you have any questions or concerns that you do not want to direct to the researcher, you are invited to contact the Ethics Administration, Human Research Ethics Committee of the NT Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research on (08) 8946 8600 or email ethics@menzies.edu.au. The Ethics team can pass on any concerns to the appropriate individuals.

Appendix D – Interview schedule

Let the conversation flow organically, using these questions as prompts if necessary. Adjust the tenses depending on whether the participant is currently attending or completed university.

- Demographic questions: home location (including postcode); age; language/family group (if happy to disclose); years at university; course; and whether the first in family; ask if it is okay for follow-up at later date.
- What did you study (or are you studying) at university? Why did you choose that course?
- How did you first hear about university? Was it something you always wanted to do?
- Did people encourage you to attend university?
- When you started, was it what you expected or heard about?
- What types of supports most helped you while studying at university?
- What were the key things that helped you to attend/participate/complete university?
- Participation rates of Indigenous males in higher education could be higher. What do you think could be done to change this?
- Did you see many other Indigenous males at your university? What impact did this have on your own participation at university?
- Was staying connected to Culture and Country important to you while at university? If so, in what ways and how did you achieve this?
- Did you encounter any challenges while at university? If so, what were they? How did you try and overcome these challenges?
- During the difficult times, who supported you?
- What relationships did you form – or become part of – during your time at university? How important were these to your success at university?
- What or who kept you motivated while at university?
- Who would you contact if you had questions or issues at university?
- What advice would you give other Indigenous males that are thinking of attending university?
- How do you think your unique contributions benefited others in your course?
- In what ways do you think you will use (or have used) your university education?
- How do you think universities can better accommodate Indigenous males from a cultural perspective?
- What does it mean to be an Indigenous male in higher education?
- What social media platforms do you use? Would you be likely to engage n online discussions with other Aboriginal males to help cope with university life?
- How has COVID-19 affected your studies? Do you think there are unique impacts on Indigenous males?
- If you had one piece of advice to give to an Indigenous male thinking about undertaking higher education, what would that be?