Examining Evidence for Autonomy and Relatedness in Urban Inuit Parenting

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Abstract

Inuit have experienced significant lifestyle changes in the past 50 years. Most recently, urbanization has resulted in greater numbers of Inuit living in urban centres in southern Canada. Little is known about Inuit parenting, and nothing has been published on Inuit parenting in an urban context. The present study sought to address this gap by describing the parenting of Inuit living in a large Canadian city and examining emergent themes for evidence of autonomy and relatedness. In partnership with the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre, 39 Inuit parents completed an interview about their parenting experiences. Based on interviews, major parenting themes included: child characteristics; parenting behaviours and beliefs; affection and love; stressors; and responsive and respectful parenting. The majority of parenting themes linked to relatedness, although there was evidence of autonomy in both parenting behaviours and child characteristics. Results are interpreted in light of the autonomy–relatedness framework and theoretical implications of findings are discussed.

Keywords

aboriginal; autonomy; Inuit; parenting; relatedness; urban

Although anthropologists (e.g., Harkness & Super, 2001) and psychologists (e.g., Rubin et al., 2006) have been studying parenting and culture for many years, there has been little psychological research into parenting in Inuit communities, and none that has assessed Inuit parenting using a theoretical model. In Canada, 50,485 persons (0.2% of the total population) among the population identify as Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2008). Although small settlements and nomadic lifestyles in Canada's northern regions have characterized most of

Inuit history, there has been an increasing trend for Inuit to settle in urban areas in the south (Statistics Canada, 2008). It is unclear how their parenting beliefs and practices have been affected by the changes in geographic, social, and family contexts. The present study examined aspects of parenting of urban Inuit using the autonomy-relatedness framework of culture (Kagitcibasi, 1994, 2005; Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007).

Inuit Population

The Inuit population traditionally lived above the tree line in Canada and it is part of the larger circumpolar Inuit population, including Greenland, Alaska, and Russia (Smylie, 2000). The Inuit population is the youngest demographic group in Canada, with a median age of 22 years for Inuit, compared to a median age of 40 years for the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2008). Inuit are also younger than both the First Nations and Métis populations. First Nations are a heterogeneous group of indigenous peoples with different tribal affiliations living in Canada, and Métis are a group of indigenous peoples whose ancestry is traced back to the intermarriage of European men and First Nations women in the western provinces in the 17th century (Isaac, 1995; Smylie, 2000). Not only are there differences in the demographics between the various Aboriginal groups: it is also important to recognize that Inuit, First Nations and Métis each have unique cultures, heritages, and socio-economic and geographic contexts (Smylie, 2000). Inuit have traditionally lived in four main regions in Canada: Nunavut, Inuvialuit, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut (Smylie, 2000), and the majority of these communities are accessible only by air (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004). Unlike other Aboriginal groups, imposition of Western culture on Inuit did not occur until the mid-20th century.

There have been profound changes in the lives of most Inuit since increased contact with non-Inuit (largely Western European Canadians) began in the 20th century. Although little research has examined the effects of colonization, Inuit have more recently suffered much of the same oppression encountered by other North American indigenous peoples, such as suppression of language, residential schools, and loss of self-determination. Fifty years ago, most Inuit in the north lived a traditional lifestyle centred on nomadic hunting, and their culture remained relatively intact (Pauktuutit, 1990). However, forced sedentarization and subsequent change to settlement-based living has significantly changed the life of Inuit families (Pauktuutit, 1990). Additionally, increasing numbers of Inuit are moving from the north to more southern urban centres. According to the 2006 census, 17 percent of Inuit are living in southern urban regions, which represents an increase of 60 percent from 1996 (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Like other indigenous populations, current literature indicates that Inuit possess very strong kinship networks (Pauktuutit, 1990). Although the nuclear family (i.e., parents and children) is considered typical of Inuit families living in the Arctic, multiple families often live together, along with other relatives (e.g., grandparents, uncles, aunts). Family ties are strong and members rely on each other for assistance and support. Family loyalties generally outweigh individual and broader community obligations. Marriages have traditionally been based on an equal partnership between husband and wife. Elders, who are older and

esteemed family members, are respected for their knowledge and wisdom and are often consulted about issues. They also play an active role in child rearing (Pauktuutit, 1990).

Parenting In Inuit Communities

The literature on Inuit parenting is derived from two main sources: academic researchers who observed child-rearing and emotion socialization of Inuit children in Canada and Eskimo¹ children in Alaska, respectively (Briggs, 1985, 1995; Sprott, 1994) and Inuit organizations (e.g., Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association). Together, these sources identified three main themes. First, nurturance and attachment are central to the adult-child relationship. Infants and small children are tenderly and sensitively nurtured, and are the recipients of much affection. They are the centre of attention for both the immediate and extended family and all their material needs and wishes are fulfilled. Briggs (1995) viewed Inuit nurturance as sometimes extreme, wavering between overprotective and harsh behaviours. Parents were observed to control the lives of children, at times choosing not to provide everything a child wanted, or scolding them instead of giving them affection. Parents were thought to act in such 'harsh' ways as a means to combat their fears of abandonment (i.e., if the child were to die, they would miss him or her less). Such behaviour was also thought to support and promote autonomous development in children. These observations of harsh parenting have not been noted by Inuit organizations, however.

Second, autonomy and independence are also central to parent-child interaction. Parents view children as the initiators of socialization and accordingly parents look for signs within their children to direct their responses. For instance, Pauktuutit (1990) found that breastfeeding and toilet-training occurred when infants provided cues to the parents, as opposed to being based on parents' agenda. Autonomy is also measured individually, based on what each child is able to accomplish, instead of whether the child has attained a certain expected level of development. As a result, parents tailor their approaches to meet each child's abilities. Parents also accord much freedom to children, allowing them to engage in almost any activity as long as it does not entail risk of harming themselves (Pauktuutit, 1990).

Third, when instructing children, Inuit parents rely on observation and interpersonal games to promote learning and development (Briggs, 1985). Inuit children have been described as learning through observation as opposed to direct instruction or questioning by the child (Crago, 1992; Pauktuutit, 1990). Accordingly, observation is used to promote learning of skills by children. Interpersonal games are used to promote the emotional development of children. Outsiders might regard some games as 'teasing,' but they are used to alert children to emotionally charged situations, to arouse appropriate emotions for the situation, and to provide practice in dealing with such emotions. These games are tailored to each child, focusing on the emotional needs or problems of a particular child, and often involve humour and indirect statements. For instance, a child having difficulty controlling aggression might be told 'Pull her hair!', to highlight the aggressive tendencies and thereby foster greater control. Adults make such statements to arouse the emotion, like anger, that they are seeking

¹Although the term 'Eskimo' is considered incorrect and offensive (Pauktuutit, 1990), Sprott and other mainly American writers continue to use this term. In the current document, the use of this term is limited to descriptions of Sprott's research.

to socialize. This is hypothesized to teach children to recognize the danger in expressing these feelings, so that parents can then provide them with ways to develop healthy and appropriate responses (Briggs, 1985).

Inuit Parenting in an Urban Context

Previous research on Inuit parenting pertains to Inuit living in the north. It is unclear how similar or dissimilar parenting in an urban context is to parenting in a northern, subsistence-based context. There are no documented accounts of Inuit parenting in an urban community, although our research found differences in the composition of families in Ottawa—a medium-sized city and the capital of Canada—compared to traditional Inuit families (McShane, Smylie, Hastings, Martin, & Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre, 2006). We found that the urban Inuit who accessed family programs were predominantly female, and those Inuit who accessed programs commented that there were fewer fathers living in Ottawa. In addition, we found that family networks were somewhat fragmented, as Elders and other extended family members remained in the north.

Little is known about the reasons why Inuit parents and families are moving to urban centres. Since 1998, acute medical care for Inuit children and adolescents from Nunavut has been based in Ottawa (Kent, 2000). Thus, some Inuit families may initially move to Ottawa for medical treatment, but it still remains unclear what would make them stay. Further, no research to date has examined the impact of migration or acculturation processes for Inuit in Canada.

Conceptualizing Inuit Parenting

When parenting characteristics are examined from the perspective of parenting style typologies, some researchers have suggested Inuit parenting can be characterized as 'permissive,' given that Inuit parents show high levels of parental warmth or responsiveness and low levels of parental control (Sprott, 1994). This conclusion is inappropriate given that such typologies were based largely on middle-class, North American, Caucasian families (Stewart & Bond, 2002). Chao (1994) suggested that parenting styles reflect certain historical influences and beliefs specific to one's culture. Consequently, because the history of the majority culture (e.g., Western European) is not shared by those from other cultures (e.g., Inuit), it would be inappropriate to apply parenting style definitions to other cultures.

Cultural researchers have instead proposed dimensional models to conceptualize parenting. One current prevailing model encompasses the constructs of relatedness and autonomy. First described by Kagitcibasi (1994), *relatedness* encompasses love, attachment, mutual obligations, and belongingness, whereas *autonomy* refers to personal choice, self-agency, and psychological independence. Kagitcibasi (2005) states that relatedness and autonomy are basic needs, and parenting serves to fulfill these needs or instill these values in children. This model allows cultures and communities to vary on both levels of autonomy and relatedness, recognizing that both are human needs.

Indigenous cultures, and specifically Inuit communities, have been characterized as collectivist, as the welfare of the family and community may be considered more important than that of the individual (Briggs, 1985). However, Rogoff (2003) stated that individual

respect is also accorded in First Nations and Inuit communities in Northern Canada, suggesting that these communities also support individual autonomy. The descriptions of Inuit parenting provided by Briggs (1985, 1995) and Sprott (1992, 1994) include evidence of both autonomy and relatedness. Parents' respect for children's personal choice and independence is displayed in their focus on what a child can do, instead of using some predetermined marker by which to compare their child. Affection and close family ties would contribute to the value of relatedness.

Kagitcibasi (2005) delineates a family model where parenting instills both values of autonomy and relatedness. In this model of psychological interdependence, families support material independence and psychological interdependence between generations. Autonomy is more desirable in urban settings, in part due to schooling and employment specialization. The relevance of this model for urban Inuit parenting is not clear, though, as Inuit experiences with the school system have been linked to trauma due to forced residential schooling and subsequent abuse (King, 2006), and therefore might link schooling with autonomy. In some indigenous contexts, autonomy may be fostered through noninterference, which is designed to promote empathy, valuing of harmony, and other cooperative characteristics (Brant, 1990). However, studies have found noninterference in Mohawk and First Nations cultures, not Inuit culture specifically, thus it is unclear whether this would be a viable explanation for the importance placed on autonomy among Inuit parents.

Objectives

In order to conceptualize the parenting of Inuit, a qualitative and collaborative approach was employed. We utilized open-ended interviews with Inuit parents and grandparents. In keeping with ethical guidelines for research with Aboriginal peoples (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2007), our research team included both academic and community-based researchers who collaborated on the research design, analysis, and interpretation. There were two main objectives: (1) to describe the aspects of parenting of southern urban Inuit; and (2) to identify parenting themes of Inuit in terms of relatedness and autonomy. Two specific hypotheses were proposed. Based on Inuit parenting in the north (Briggs, 1985, 1995; Pauktuutit, 1990; Sprott, 1992), autonomy was expected to be seen in parents' reports of respecting their child's development and tailoring their actions to their child's age or characteristics. Relatedness was expected to be seen in parenting themes of nurturance and love, and family and community commitments.

Method

Participants

Individuals were recruited from the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre in Ottawa, Canada. Potential participants were initially identified by the community research team members who were Inuit. Identified individuals were provided with a description of the study and then were invited to participate if they were interested. As the goal was to gather information on parenting, parents of all ages were invited to participate. Thirty-nine adults were recruited to participate in the study ($M = 39.31$ years; range = 24 to 78 years). This

sample included 8 males and 31 females. All individuals were parents and 13 individuals were also grandparents.

Procedure

This study was conducted as part of a larger investigation of health information processes which employed a participatory action research (PAR) approach. PAR has been defined as the collaboration of communities or organizations and researchers for the purpose of research, education, advocacy, or promoting social change (Green et al., 1995). At the core of PAR is the integration of community members as equal partners. It is considered the most appropriate approach to use when conducting research with Aboriginal communities (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2007; Inuit Tapirisat of Canada and Nunavut Research Institute, 1998). A more detailed description of the development of the partnership with Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre and a description of the participating community appears in McShane et al. (2006) and Smylie, McShane, and Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre (2006). This study was approved by the Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa.

To obtain information on parenting, parents were first asked: 'Tell me what it is like to be a parent or a grandparent.' To elicit more detail, two follow-up questions were posed: 'What do you see as special in your children or grandchildren?', and 'How do you support your children or grandchildren?' The community research team confirmed the appropriateness of the wording of these questions for encouraging parents to talk, and deemed them suitable for translation into Inuktitut.

Two trained community research team members conducted the interviews. Participants were given the choice to complete the interview in English ($n = 12$) or in Inuktitut ($n = 27$). A translation of the questions was used for interviews in Inuktitut. Responses were audio-recorded, translated if necessary, and transcribed in English for coding purposes. Back-translations of questions and responses were used to confirm accuracy of translations.

Coding

Data analysis used a mixed iterative editorial and immersion/crystallization organizational approach (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Initially, the coding was completed by two trained academic researchers who listed the most poignant themes of the community's parenting descriptions. A meeting was then held with the community research team members to discuss and adapt themes. Following this, the two academic researchers took these preliminary themes and conducted a more detailed analysis of the transcripts to synthesize a coding scheme. Using this coding scheme, the principal coder coded all transcripts and the reliability coder coded 20 randomly selected transcripts for the frequency of each of the themes. Inter-rater agreement was calculated using intra-class correlations, $r = .72$ to $.96$ (see Table 1).

Next, parenting themes were classified according to how they related to the constructs of relatedness and autonomy as defined by Kagitcibasi (1994, 2005) and Rothbaum and Trommsdorff (2007). Relatedness was defined as family-, group- or community-centred, promoting love, attachment, belongingness, caring, mutual obligations, and loyalty.

Autonomy was defined as individual-centred, promoting personal choice, self-agency, independence, and personal rights. An 'Other' category was used for themes that were not indicative of either relatedness or autonomy. The following categories were submitted to this coding scheme: child characteristics; behaviours; affection and love; contextual stressors; beliefs; and responsive and respectful. The remaining themes were not included in this analysis because initial inspection revealed that instances were linked most frequently to the 'Other' category. Using the coding scheme, the two coders evaluated each occurrence of the above-listed themes as indicative of autonomy, relatedness, or other. Examples of autonomy and relatedness for each theme are presented in Table 2. Inter-rater agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, $\kappa = .89$ to 1.00. Disagreements were discussed and codes were revised for inclusion in the analysis.

Results

Thirty-nine interviews were transcribed and analysed. Mean word length of interviews was 184 words, ranging from 21 words to 743 words. Table 1 contains the descriptive statistics for the 12 themes. Themes are presented below, in descending order of frequency.²

Child Characteristics

Parents provided descriptions of their children's or adolescents' identity, personality, abilities, skills, temperament, or interests. Characteristics included: intelligent/skilled (e.g., athletic, artistic); independent/strong; nurturant/considerate; happy; and negative (e.g., stubborn). There were also a wide variety of child characteristics that were mentioned infrequently, including: able to function in multicultural setting; innocent; relaxed; beautiful; enjoys Inuk culture; humorous; and gentle.

Parenting Behaviours

Parents described the specific support and actions they performed. These included: statements related to warmth/supportive ('I am there for them'); instruct/guide/teach/talk ('Teach them to help others so they won't be selfish'); providing basic needs ('I support them financially'); and control/discipline ('Try to discipline them as much as I can'). Other behaviours included: prayers; using language to promote culture; fostering a sense of family membership; and providing choices.

Affection and Love

Parents described a warm, connected feeling toward their children or toward parenting. They described parenting or their relationship with their children using positive adjectives. Examples include: 'It's rewarding,' 'It's a joy,' 'I love it,' 'I love them,' and 'You feel proud.'

²*Statistical analyses.* A series of chi-square analyses were computed to examine differences in frequencies in each of the 12 parenting themes, according to participant gender and grandparent status (no/yes). For these analyses, the parenting themes were re-coded as present/absent in each transcript to allow 2×2 analyses. No chi-squares examining differences according to gender were significant: all $\chi^2(1) < 2.60$, $p > .10$. Only one chi-square examining differences according to grandparent status was significant: parent vs. grandparent, $\chi^2(1) = 8.91$, $p < .01$. All participants who mentioned this theme were grandparents.

Parenting Beliefs

Parents described their thoughts and cognitions about their role as parents. Statements included how they felt their child has influenced them, as well as the responsibility or challenging nature of their role. Some beliefs included: responsibility/challenge ('It's a lot of work'); relationship-focused ('Without them my life would be empty'); competence ('I know I did an amazing job with them'); and 'other' ('They keep me busy').

Contextual Stressors

Just under half of the parents mentioned economic stressors, personal health problems, work stressors, changes in social context, and children being placed in care (with the regional child welfare and protection authority³). Examples include: 'I'm on welfare;' 'I'm a single parent;' 'My parents are not in the south;' 'It [parenting] can cost you your career;' and 'That's double for me, double job after working hours.' One mother spoke at length about the stress of having a child removed from home:

When you are a single mother they always try to take away your baby or you have to get married. If you do that, you have to give your baby away anyway. In order to keep the baby, if you're a single mother, you have to talk to the city, otherwise they are always try to take away your baby.

Responsive and Respectful

Almost one-third of parents described how their behaviours were tailored specifically to the child. Parents discussed how they responded directly to their children's needs or how they tailored their behaviours to match their child's needs and abilities:

Like if they need comforting, I'll comfort them, if they are hungry, I'll feed them, if they are hungry for snack, I'll feed them, if they want simply hug or kiss, I'll hug and kiss them, or if they want attention from me, I'll listen to them.

We take what each of them like and try to make that. J. is a natural athlete so and we are supporting him by getting him involved by soccer and swimming ... C. doesn't want to do that, is more into arts so we get him to art classes, things like that.

Some also mentioned mutual obligations or reciprocal help and described engaging in parent-child collaboration and compromise. Examples include: 'We both try to come up with something that we can both live with;' and 'He had an intervention, he took me out of the bingo, and I took him out of the bar.'

Negative Parent Emotions

Fewer than a third of parents described parenting as a negative experience or talked about having a difficult relationship with their child. They reported frustration, anxiety, or anger with their role as parents or in their relationship with their child. Examples include: 'It's frustrating;' 'I'm constantly worried;' and 'It's stressful.'

³In Ottawa, the Children's Aid Society is the regional child welfare and protection authority. It is non-indigenous and is run by provincial authorities who have a legal mandate to protect children aged 17 years and younger.

Concern for Child's Health

Eight parents reported worry about their child's health or difficulty in maintaining their child's health. Some parents reported their efforts to keep their child healthy. Examples include: 'It's difficult, especially when they don't want to eat;' and 'Keep them in healthy shape.'

Family and Community

Eight parents discussed the help and/or involvement of family members (other than their spouse) or community organizations. This also included having accessed those resources or simply indicating that they are accessible to the parents. Examples include: 'If I can't do it alone, I get someone who is more experienced to help me with it;' and 'to have parenting classes here at the resource centre really helped.'

Parent vs. Grandparent Differences

Four grandparents mentioned differences between being a parent and being a grandparent, or indicated preferences to raising grandchildren as compared to children. Examples include: 'I love my grandkids more than I love my own kids;' 'For my grandkids, because I am always twice as available;' and '[being a grandmother] It's like being a mother but with more power.'

Future

Three parents referred to the child's future, or their plans and ideas about the future, such as: 'Make a better future for them;' and 'I just really worry, also their future.'

Age Differences: Children vs. Adolescents

Three parents mentioned differences in raising children compared to adolescents. They commented that raising young adolescents was more difficult than raising children or young adults. Examples include: 'When they are getting older, when they reach the age of 13 or 14, it gets harder lots of difficult thing[s] start coming, especially now in 2005;' and 'My daughter is 18. She is a lot better than when she was 13 or 14, so it's not that bad.'

Examination of Autonomy and Relatedness

The following themes were examined for reference to the constructs of autonomy and relatedness: affection and love; child characteristics; behaviours; contextual stressors; beliefs; and responsive and respectful. Table 3 contains the frequencies for themes according to focus (autonomy, relatedness, other).⁴ In the comparison of overall frequencies of

⁴*Statistical analyses.* A 6×3 within-subjects ANOVA with planned comparisons was used to test for differences in frequencies of themes (child characteristics, behaviours, affection and love, contextual stressors, beliefs, and responsive and respectful) according to focus (relatedness, autonomy, other). The overall multivariate test for focus, based on Wilks' criteria, was significant: $F(2, 37) = 28.76$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .61$. A planned paired t -test was used to compare overall frequencies of autonomy and relatedness statements. The t -test found significantly higher frequencies of relatedness statements: $t(38) = 5.32$, $p < .001$. The overall multivariate test for an interaction effect between theme and focus, based on Wilks' criteria, was also significant: $F(10, 29) = 11.31$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .80$. Planned paired t -tests were used to compare autonomy and relatedness frequencies for each of the six themes. For the themes of: affection and love, $t(38) = 6.64$, $p < .001$; parenting behaviours, $t(38) = 3.32$, $p < .01$; parenting beliefs, $t(38) = 2.23$, $p < .05$; and contextual stressors, $t(38) = 1.84$, $p < .10$, there was significantly greater relatedness focus. Only the t -test examining responsive and respectful, $t(38) = 2.28$, $p < .05$ revealed a higher frequency of autonomy focus.

autonomy and relatedness statements, significantly higher frequencies of relatedness statements were noted. For the themes of affection and love, parenting behaviours, parenting beliefs, and contextual stressors, there was significantly greater relatedness focus. For responsive and respectful, there was a higher frequency of autonomy focus. Overall, analyses showed that most statements were indicative of a relatedness focus within the urban Inuit community's approach to parenting.

Discussion

Characterizations of Inuit parenting have been limited to Inuit living in the north; very little is known about Inuit parenting in a southern urban context. We addressed this gap in the literature and furthered our understanding of autonomy and relatedness in this cultural context. Emergent themes of parenting were consistent with observations of Inuit parenting in the north and were generally similar to parenting constructs in general. Parenting themes were indicative of both autonomy and relatedness, although more often they were linked to relatedness.

Parenting behaviours that focused on providing the basic necessities for children (e.g., food and clothing) were prevalent. Previous work with urban Aborigines in Australia found that parenting values were ordered in a similar fashion to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Nelson & Allison, 2000); that is to say, at the apex were parenting values and behaviours focused on the *survival* of children. The focus of Inuit parents on basic needs might follow a similar pattern. However, Inuit parents reported more teaching and instructing behaviours than actions to promote basic needs. This might be reflective of Inuit parents' broader focus on health, including physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health. It might also indicate that teaching is considered a part of basic needs. Also, although a focus on basic needs was not predominant in the answers, the community research team has observed that parents do struggle to meet the basic needs for their children.

Some parents noted that their children were growing up in a multi-cultural society, unlike their own experiences growing up in the north. A few spoke directly about their children's mixed Inuit ancestry, suggesting that this was a source of stress. These particular stressors seem more common in an urban context, where intercultural relationships are perhaps more likely to exist. However, most parents spoke about their children's ability to negotiate the multicultural, multilingual world. This points toward the acculturation process and suggests that parents see their children as balancing between the heritage culture and the mainstream culture, in accord with bidirectional models of acculturation (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). Inuit parents thus appear to be navigating through both Inuk and mainstream cultures.

There were very few statements about the effects of colonization, forced sedenterization, or personal trauma. One parent commented that in the north, mothers who have a substance abuse problem have their children removed in order that the children can be properly cared for and allowing the mothers to look after themselves. There was also limited discussion about Children's Aid Society and the removal of children in the urban context. However, given the limited scope of the interview, it is unclear whether such stresses in the parenting experience of urban Inuit are related to colonization and associated trauma.

Evidence for Autonomy and Relatedness

As predicted, parenting themes of urban Inuit parents evidenced both autonomy and relatedness. Overall, the most prevalent themes were more indicative of relatedness. There was evidence of nurturance and love in the parenting of urban Inuit but, counter to our prediction, there was little evidence of focus on extended family and community aspects. Inuit and Aboriginal families and communities have consistently been found to have closer family relationships and stronger social networks than non-Aboriginal families (e.g., MacPhee, Fritz, & Miller-Heyl, 1996; Pauktuutit, 1990). The current findings suggest that the parenting situation might be different for urban Inuit. The relatively low reporting of family and community support in parenting could stem from the isolation separating parents from family and community members. Family and community links for support typically involve face-to-face contact (McShane et al., 2006). Given the physical separation, parents had to reconfigure their support networks and fewer parents reported accessing traditional supports. The fact that contextual stressors were linked to relatedness may reflect such changes. Alternatively, parents might not have articulated reliance on families and communities for parenting support because this is so ingrained in their approach that it was not salient as a distinct, identifiable component.

An alternative explanation is that there are two sub-types of relatedness: a more ‘Western’ form of relatedness, trust in shared personal relationships; and a more ‘Eastern’ assurance in loyalty and reciprocity (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007; Yamagishi, 2002). Within the responses of urban Inuit parents, the presence of affection, love, and nurturance appears indicative of the construct of trust, whereas the infrequent mention of community reliance and connection appears indicative of assurance. It is possible that assurance was mentioned relatively rarely due to fragmentation of the Inuit communities and the lack of traditional land-based communal activities, which may have undermined group belongingness. Further examination of the construct of relatedness in Inuit communities would help to address this proposition. In addition, research needs to validate the definitions ascribed to the terms autonomy, relatedness, trust, and assurance. The current definitions may not accurately capture the underlying constructs as they exist in Inuit communities.

Autonomy was also evidenced in urban Inuit parents’ experience, albeit to a lesser extent. Autonomy and independence were principally captured by the theme ‘responsive and respectful.’ The freedom and independence which has been described in parent–child relationships in the north (Pauktuutit, 1990) was not prevalent in the descriptions of urban Inuit parents. This might be because the urban environment has more dangers than the north. It might also be because in the north the kinship support system is strong and large, allowing other adults to ‘keep an eye’ on children, thereby protecting them from danger. Thus, parents might be adapting their strategies based on the context to ensure the health and well-being of their children.

Kagitcibasi (2005) has suggested that with increasing urbanization there is more focus on autonomy. The urban Inuit are relatively new to the urbanization experience and thus might not have fully subscribed to the value of autonomy yet. Alternatively, the links between urbanization and autonomy may in fact follow different paths for Inuit. That is, education may not be the contributing factor to increased autonomy in urban settings. Anecdotally, our

research team is aware that, in general, participants accessing the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre experience lower rates of employment and educational attainment. This might suggest that the current generation has not adopted the value of autonomy because the mechanisms engendering this value change are still in the process of developing.

It is also important to note that much of the theorizing about the constructs of autonomy and relatedness and the changes due to urbanization are informed by research with different cultural groups. Furthermore, this research typically examines how families within a given cultural group move from a rural to an urban setting (e.g., Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005). The Inuit are moving from an Inuit-majority remote Arctic area to an Inuit-minority urban area. Thus, the processes of urbanization and acculturation are intertwined, perhaps making it similar to the experience of some immigrants and refugees. However, for Inuit and other indigenous populations the process of acculturation has been ongoing and dominated by colonization.

The extent to which the parenting themes generated by urban Inuit parents differed from the kinds of themes that would be generated by Inuit parents living in more traditional northern contexts was inferred from previous research on northern Inuit, rather than measured directly. In addition to increasing migration to urban centres in the south, recent years have also borne witness to substantive changes to Inuit life in the north (Pauktuutit, 1990). Although the Inuit have been able to maintain their language and aspects of their culture, in many ways this is a culture and group of communities experiencing a dynamic period of cultural and generational change. It will be important to continue examining the evolution of parenting by Inuit in the north—for example, how northern Inuit manage to maintain familial and community connections with their extended family members who have relocated to the south.

The community-participatory nature of this research may have impacted the reports provided by parents. Unlike other research methodologies, the interviewers were members of the Inuit community and were also front-line health workers at the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre. This approach is recommended by Aboriginal communities and Canadian granting agencies, in large part for its respect for Aboriginal peoples, involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the research process, and support of building capacity for research in Aboriginal communities. That said, it is possible that some parents may have spoken more openly or less openly based on the nature of their relationship with the interviewer. Finally, the fact that parenting behaviours and child characteristics were the two most frequent themes is likely due to the fact that questions were geared towards these responses.

Conclusions

This study represents a first attempt to describe and characterize parenting in a southern urban Inuit community. Results are generally similar to parenting characteristics previously identified in Inuit communities in the north, although with some interesting differences. Relatedness was more dominant than autonomy in parenting themes. It is unclear whether the current findings on urban Inuit parenting are reflective of effects of the urban context alone, broader socio-historical changes, or both. Further examination of Inuit parenting in

the north would help to clarify whether the current parenting trends are indicative of a change from land-based to settlement-based life, and would also help to clarify whether additional changes have occurred as a result of living in southern urban centres.

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THE TUNGASUVVINGAT INUIT FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE (TIFRC) is an independent community-based counseling and resource centre whose mission is to provide Inuit-specific programs, services, and support to empower and enhance the lives of Inuit living in southern regions of Ontario, Canada. Community research team members include Connie Siedule, Eva Kigutaq, and Iga Attagutsiak, and community Elders Qapik Attagutsiak, Kigutikajuk Shappa, and Susanna Singoorie.

Table 1Descriptive statistics of parenting themes ($N = 39$)

	<i>N</i>	Min.	Max.	ICC
Child characteristics	29	0	12	.89
Intelligent/skilled	20			
Independent/strong	13			
Nurturant/considerate	8			
Happy	3			
Negative	3			
Other	12			
Parenting behaviours	33	0	7	.76
Instruct/teach/guide/talk	22			
Warmth/supportive	18			
Basic needs (food, home, clothing, etc.)	10			
Control/discipline	4			
Other	6			
Affection and love	29	0	6	.80
Contextual stressors	15	0	6	.72
Parenting beliefs	22	0	3	.76
Responsibility/challenge	13			
Relationship-focused	6			
Competence	1			
Other	2			
Responsive and respectful	12	0	5	.80
Support individuality	11			
Mutual partnership	3			
Negative emotions	12	0	2	.89
Anxiety/worry/fear	9			
Anger/frustration	3			
Concern about child's health	8	0	3	.94
Proactive (health promotion efforts)	4			
Reactive (difficulty/worry)	4			
Family and community	8	0	3	.78
Parent/grandparent differences	4	0	5	.96
Future	3	0	3	.70
Child age differences	3	0	1	.69

Note. ICC = Intraclass Correlation. *N* = Refers to the number of parents who reported at least one instance of the category or the subcategory. The subcategory numbers may exceed the category total because a parent could be counted once at the category level, and twice at the sub-category level as they reported more than subcategory.

Table 2

Examples of themes indicating autonomy and relatedness

	Autonomy	Relatedness
Child characteristics	<i>Really independent already. They're just unique in their own way.</i>	<i>They are so special because they, our kids, they have our features too.</i>
Parenting behaviours	<i>Give them lots of independence.</i>	<i>Trying to make them feel good being a part of the family.</i>
Contextual stressors	<i>It's [parenting] costly, even costs your career.</i>	<i>I didn't have my parents living with me because we were living in the south all the time.</i>
Parenting Beliefs	–	<i>To me they are my first.</i>
Responsive and respectful	<i>Let him do what he wants.</i>	<i>I have to try to come with a solution with them; we both try to come up with something that we can both live with.</i>

Table 3

Frequency and percentages of themes indicating autonomy and relatedness

	Autonomy	Relatedness	Other	
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	Total count
Child characteristics	18 (20.5)	12 (13.6)	58 (65.9)	88
Parenting behaviours	3 (3.6)	19 (22.6)	62 (73.8)	84
Affection and love	(0)	68 (100)	(0)	68
Contextual stressors	1 (3.5)	14 (48.3)	14 (48.3)	29
Parenting beliefs	(0)	6 (23.1)	20 (76.9)	26
Responsive and respectful	22 (84.6)	4 (15.4)	(0)	26