Published in final edited form as:

Transcult Psychiatry. 2014 October ; 51(5): 713–734. doi:10.1177/1363461514532512.

“Where I Have to Learn the Ways How to Live:” Youth Resilience in a Yup’ik Village in Alaska

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Abstract

What is it like to grow-up Yup’ik and come-of-age today in a traditional hunting-gathering community setting located in a remote region of Alaska? Current research describes a contemporary experience often laden with trauma and crisis. Youth in Yup’ik communities today face threats to their very survival as they encounter, early on, things that their ancestors never faced – including alcohol-related deaths, violence in many forms, and high rates of suicide among their young peers. Yet all is not despair for the youth growing up in these remote indigenous communities. Many youth grow-up to become skilled hunters, strong leaders, and able parents. This paper reports findings from the Alaskan Yup’ik site of the Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood (CIPA) study. The goal of this study is to identify strengths and resilience in youth living in a Yup’ik community in southwest Alaska. Interviews were conducted with 25 youth age 11–18, currently residing in a southwest Alaska community. Qualitative analysis revealed important connections between local stressors, community-level protective resources, and youth-driven, solution-focused strategies for overcoming hardship and learning the ‘ways how to live.’ Findings from this study contribute critical information on indigenous youth protection and resilience, including community and cultural resilience processes beyond the individual level, and enhance our understanding of the types of resources that can lead to improved outcomes for Alaska Native youth.

Keywords

Alaska Native; indigenous; youth; social change; resilience

Yupik culture is like *where I have to learn the ways how to live*. Speaking the language and making traps the old way. I learned how to make a blackfish trap and I learned how to make a net. I was going to make a spear and a new hook but I kind

of messed up on the spear and actually made an arrow. (*17-year-old, male youth participant in the Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood study*)

The quote that opens this paper is from an interview that took place in a Yup'ik Alaska Native community as part of a study that aims to examine indigenous youth resilience in the arctic. The young man quoted above was, at the time of his interview, mid-way through his senior year in high school and on track to graduate. This is no small accomplishment in a community where school dropout rates for young men hover at near 40%. How did he do this? How did this particular young man manage to stay in school, and at the same time, come to appreciate, value, and internalize Yup'ik language and traditional knowledge: In his own words, how did he come to see 'the arrow in a broken spear?' How was it that he came to a realization, simply and eloquently put, that to be Yup'ik means learning "the ways how to live?" These are critical questions to be asking while the reported rate of suicide among Alaska Native males between the ages of 15–35 reaches an all time high for the communities in southwest Alaska (Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, 2007). Why has this young man achieved such a life affirming realization, a clearer sense of who he is and where he comes from, while others in this same community became lost young souls, some of which, a precious few, will ultimately become community losses to suicide? Perhaps elements of this young man's story, and other stories like his, will help us to understand the roots of resilience for others in his footsteps?

The Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood (CIPA) study is part of a long-term community-based and participatory program of research at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Center for Alaska Native Health Research examining the strengths and resources of Alaska Native people and their communities; the goal of this work is to develop interventions for Yup'ik youth and their families that increase these strengths and protections (Allen et al., 2011; Allen, et al., 2006; Allen, et al., 2009; Mohatt, Rasmus, et al., 2007; Mohatt, Rasmus et al., 2004; Mohatt, Hazel et al. 2004). The research for this paper took place as part of an international, circumpolar team effort to conduct cross-site comparative work on youth stress and resilience in the arctic (Ulturgasheva, et al., 2011). The goal of the study was to understand more about the contemporary Yup'ik Alaska Native youth experience and to create a more interconnected, global arctic youth initiative based on strength and hope for the future.

The arctic has always posed special threats and challenges to survival for those living on its lands. Today, for young people growing up in the arctic indigenous communities in Alaska, threats and challenges remain an enduring while at the same time radically changed part of daily life. Only a few generations back the greatest dangers were faced out on the land, and most often away from the camp or village – in an overturned *qayaq* (kayak) at sea, a sudden white-out (blizzard) on the tundra, or a patch of rotten ice that gives way during a river crossing. Now young people are instead much more likely to face their greatest dangers at home, at school, or somewhere else within the confines of the village community – in a drinking parent or relative, a jealous friend, or their own suicidal urges (Gessner, 1997; Kettl & Bixler, 1993; Wexler & Goodwin, 2006). These new experiences in the lives of youth are products of a relatively recent colonial history in Alaska. In one generation, indigenous ways

of life, including the very terms of prosperity and survival, changed quickly and dramatically, and these changes were externally and forcibly imposed.

Much has been written on the impacts of social change for arctic indigenous peoples (Chance, 1990; Napoleon, 1996; Smith & McCarter, 1997). However, few studies attempt to detail the countervailing processes of social and cultural resistance, invention, and adaptation that have accompanied these changes. Youth are on forefront of this social movement that seeks to adapt, creating new strategies for dealing with current circumstances and experiences. Youth in the arctic provide an important window into one possible future for local indigenous existence in an increasingly globalized world. In this paper, we provide for readers a glimpse through the window of these arctic youth, presenting narrative case examples of contemporary youth experience from interviews conducted in a southwest Alaska Yup'ik village. We seek to present an in-depth and experiential account of the everyday lives of Alaska Native youth lived today in a rural community context. We seek to describe contemporary sources of stress and adversity, and the strategies in response for being well and remaining strong, including the resources accessed by youth on both the individual and community level, all from the perspective of youth. We will combine this youth-driven narrative approach with a modified-grounded theory approach that will generate predominate resilience strategies and their connective linkages using the life stories of youth. Results from this study are intended to reveal the ways that youth are creatively, albeit not always adaptively, accessing community resources and coping with local stressors and obstacles on their pathway to adulthood.

Our approach builds on theories of 1) colonial stress and its impacts upon childhood and adolescent experience in the arctic and the north (Briggs, 1998; Condon, 1988, 1990, 1995; Condon & Stern, 1993; Elias et al., 2012; Kirmayer et al., 2007; O'Neil, 1986); 2) cultural continuity and its relationship to indigenous well-being (Chandler & Proulx, 2006; Chandler & Lalonde, 1995, 1998); and 3) indigenous and community resilience (Denham, 2008; Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011). We explore resilience broadly at multiple ecological levels, defining resilience as a dynamic process involving networks of people, events, and settings sharing relationships, linkages, interactions, and transactions that distribute and transform resources across these networks. Resilience processes enable systems to maintain similar structure and functioning on the community and cultural level, despite shock and disturbance, and enable individuals within systems to remain strong or adapt positively to adverse experience. Adversity may include personal setbacks and trauma, as well as collective experience such as disease, natural disaster, and historical and ongoing colonization. This view of resilience involves careful attention to context first, with an overarching emphasis on facilitative environments that are most responsible in the creation of positive outcomes on the individual level (Allen et al., this issue; Kirmayer et al, 2011; Unger, 2011). Increasingly, researchers are focusing on community and systems-level capacities and resources to understand events and responses occurring in individuals and families (Kirmayer et al., 2009).

Our aim is to present a picture of Yup'ik youth stressors and resilience strategies in the contemporary arctic. We do this in order to promote better understanding of how these experiences emerge from and connect with community-level processes. We are also

interested in how what we might learn from these Yup'ik case examples has generalizability through its relevance to all people undergoing similar life-stage transitions in a variety of contexts where systems-level change has been recent, dramatic, and to one degree or another, imposed from without.

Method

Context and Approach

This study took place within a Yupik Alaska Native community context and utilized a youth-driven community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach (Ford, Rasmus & Allen, 2012). The study community is a Yup'ik village of approximately 700 people located in southwest Alaska near the Bering Sea coast. The community is one of the world's few remaining sites maintaining a primarily hunting and gathering economy (Lamb & Hewlett, 2005). Land mammals (moose) and sea mammals (seals, beluga whales) along with fish (salmon, whitefish) comprise the basis of the contemporary diet for most in the community and daily life is maintained around these resources. The village is located off of the road system and is hundreds of miles by air from the nearest major city in Alaska. Wage employment is limited in the village with the primary jobs provided by the tribal organizations and state government. Much like other Native villages in Alaska, the study community is a young community with the median age being 21 years at the 2010 Census. There is a K-12 school in the village but many parents choose to send their high school age children to boarding schools located in other parts of Alaska.

Our team has been working within the rural communities in southwest Alaska for over a decade to address disparities in rates of suicide and substance abuse experienced particularly among youth in this region (Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, 2000). This current study utilizes and builds upon our established CBPR relationships within the village community to add a critical youth-driven dimension to our collaborative, community process and is described in detail in a recent publication (Ford, Rasmus & Allen, 2012).

Youth were recruited to be involved as part of the Local Steering Committee (LSC) that would serve as a co-researcher team participating in the development of the study protocols and process, recruitment of youth participants, and analysis and dissemination of study findings. The LSC was formed under the guidance of a local tribal governance body in the community and initially was comprised of 6 core members, 2 youth, 2 adults and 2 elders, with the meetings open to other community members. The work of the LSC initially involved coming up with research questions and development of a youth life history interview guide. The LSC composition would change substantially as the project progressed to become more youth-centered and youth-driven, particularly in the analysis and dissemination phases.

As part of planning and implementation, the LSC took primary leadership in developing the youth recruitment and interviewing strategy that was implemented by the university co-researchers. The LSC suggested a process of nomination and snowball sampling, i.e. asking youth nominated by the LSC if they had friends that might want to be interviewed. Recruitment of youth participants turned out to be much easier than we initially anticipated,

once word got around that we were doing the interviews, several youth came up as volunteers. The LSC provided an initial list of youth they nominated as good candidates for an interview based on their reputation in the community for being a good role model for other youth and their representativeness of other youth experience in the community. We did not want to recruit only the exceptional examples of youth; we also sought to interview ‘the average youth’ within that particular community context. By the end of the planning phase of the project, we had a list of 12 youth nominated by the LSC to begin interviewing as part of the implementation phase.

As part of the planning process for recruitment and interviewing, the LSC had decided against using local interviewers from the community. We had explained our goal of achieving a more in-depth and authentic understanding of the youth experience in the community and the LSC members, particularly the youth members, felt that we would be more likely to achieve this goal by having “outside interviewers” talk to the young people. The reason for this, as stated by several LSC members, was that youth may feel more comfortable sharing their story with those not from the close-knit community, feeling more assured of their privacy and confidentiality. The LSC did think it was important though that we provide the option of being interviewed by a male or female researcher from the university and using these decision-markers we recruited two graduate student interviewers (one male and one female) to add to our university interviewing team. The Principal Investigators (Allen & Rasmus) worked alongside the Graduate Research Assistant/Study Coordinator (Ford) and with the two additional graduate student interviewers to conduct the interviews at the village school.

Participants

We began by approaching the 12 youth nominated by the LSC. All youth, except for one, agreed to be interviewed. Snowball sampling procedures lead to the recruitment of an additional 13 youth for a total sample size of 25 youth. This sample included 6 females and 7 males age 11–14, and 6 females and 6 males age 15–18. Our LSC had advised us not to turn youth away who came forward or were nominated by their peers to participate in the study. The LSC emphasized all youth who volunteered to be interviewed and wanted to be recognized for their strengths should have the chance to participate in a study describing what’s going right for Alaska Native youth in the village community.

Study Design and Analytical Procedures

The interviews took place over a two-week period in the study community. An oral consent procedure was used to gain permission from parents and assent from youth (for the 11–17 year olds) to participate in the study. Youth over 18 provided their own consent to participate. Youth were given a cash payment for their time spent in the interview and most youth, at the end of their interview, reported positive benefits from participating including a “clearer mind” and “good feeling.” The life history interviews (White, 2006) were approximately 1 to 3 hours in duration, and some were conducted over two to three separate sessions. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Analysis began with careful review of the available literature on indigenous youth stress and resilience in the north, which informed an initial narrative analytic approach to the data (Condon, 1988; Condon & Stern, 1994; Herman & Vervaeck, 2005; Holsteing & Gubrium, 2012; Hurwitz, Greenhalgh, & Skultans, 2004) and contributed to the development of a modified grounded-theory approach (Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to coding. Analysis progressed in a way that represents a three-tiered qualitative method, which involved; 1) narrative analysis and the generation of composite case examples of contemporary Yup'ik youth experiences of stress and resilience, 2) modified grounded theory coding to identify local indicators of youth stress and resilience, and 3) ATLAS.ti software assisted modeling to generate code networks revealing relationships between coding categories.

The rationale for using a multi-step qualitative analytical process related primarily to our strong commitment to CBPR principles and practice. Narrative analysis allowed us to maintain critical elements of context in our presentation of findings at the community level and helped to ensure that the youth voice was maintained in our study at each level in the research process. By the time we reached the analytical phase of the study, our LSC was primarily composed of youth. These young people made it clear to us that it was important that their story be told and told in their own words and voice. We decided together that a narrative approach would allow us to preserve certain contextual features and voice and would also allow us to protect the identity and privacy of participants by creating “composite case examples” of youth experience drawing from several of the youth interviews as opposed to featuring just one. Our first step in the narrative analysis was to read through and memo the 25 life history interviews and to produce summaries for each (Glasner, 1998).

Memoing involves an intentional review of each transcript to identify key narrative threads and events in each life story to produce a narrative “snapshot” of a life history (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The life histories from the older youth were substantially richer and more complex, lending themselves more effectively to this process. We created memos from the six life history interviews with females and from the seven life history interviews with males between the ages of 15–18. We then used these memos to produce two composite case examples of youth experience, one detailing a “typical” youth experience for older teenage girls in the village and the other detailing a “typical” youth experience for older teenage boys in the village. We then presented these to the LSC as part of a community member-checking process step where our findings are reviewed at each stage and feedback is solicited. The youth were asked if they felt the composites were; 1) “real” enough to represent Yup'ik youth experiences, and 2) if they were “private” enough to ensure that no one youth's identity is recognizable. The youth all agreed that the composites did sound like they could have been from any of the youth in the community and they did not feel that any of the quotes were recognizable. One youth said, “we all talk like that in the village.”

Memoing was also a critical step in the second part of our multi-level analysis, contributing to the creation of a codebook that would be used to help us answer our primary research questions related to Yup'ik youth stress and resilience. Using a modified grounded theory analytical process we began with an initial or “open” coding phase, with the goal of

identifying key terms and concepts arising descriptively from the narratives. We attempted to keep the open coding consistent with what participants described ‘in their own words.’ This in turn guided data identification directly from key narrative passages or “quotations” contained in the interviews that were used to demarcate larger conceptual domains identified through “focused” codes (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, “emergent” or “theoretical” categories are provisional conceptual categories that contain the focused code bundles. The Yup’ik site codebook consisted of 36 focused codes with approximately half again as many emergent theoretical code categories. Figure 1 presents a page from the Yup’ik site codebook.

The third step in our three-tiered process involved the use of ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software to produce coding co-occurrence indices (c-index; Garcia, 2005) for focused coding categories developed in our analysis. These indices describe the magnitude of the relationships between frequently used terms and themes in the data, providing another way to understand how stressors and resilience strategies are defined locally. This analytic approach was used to suggest indicators of youth stressors and in particular, resilience strategies that formed networks occurring at the social-cultural and community level of analysis.

Results

We first present the two composite youth narratives. Following this, we provide results from the modified grounded-theory analysis including the analysis of co-occurrence with ATLAS.ti modeling.

Narratives of Youth Stressors and Resilience Strategies

Joanne¹—Joanne is two months away from turning 16-years-old and is in the 10th grade. Joanne lives with her mother and her stepfather, but spends most of her time at her maternal grandfather’s house, with her older brother and his girlfriend, or at her boyfriend’s grandmother’s house. A normal day for Joanne involves the following experiences:

I wake up, have cereal, go across to my grandpa’s to take a shower, get ready, go to school, do schoolwork all day, go home, eat, watch TV, help my parents, go to basketball practice. After basketball practice, I go back to my grandpa’s, go on the Internet for a while and go home and go to bed.

For Joanne, the main challenges in her life so far have been her parent’s drinking, boyfriend problems, and other girls gossiping about her in the village. Much of this Joanne is able to deal with on her own. She describes, for example, strategies for when her parents drink.

Like when they drink every now and then, like recently, and they do something crazy, I get mad and just holler at them. After that I’ll just leave them alone, let them do their thing and go to my grandpa’s.

Joanne has older brothers to help her deal with her boyfriend problems. Joanne’s older brothers helped raise her and they continue to play an important role in her life, particularly as she navigates her relationships with boys. Joanne has had some problems in the past with

¹All names used are pseudonyms.

physically abusive and jealous boyfriends, but she used a different strategy with her current boyfriend to prevent harm from happening to her again.

Well before getting to know each other, I told my boyfriend what my brothers would do if a guy hit me, because I am like the baby of the family, and my brothers are really over-protective of me. My boyfriend was like – ‘I would never hit a girl’ or something – and I was like ‘yeah, that’s what every guy says.’ But he’s never hit me. But if he does, it’s like totally over because I don’t know, my brothers would end it anyways.

Joanne has active strategies in place to deal with drinking parents and boyfriends. These things bother her and present challenges, but to her these are not her greatest challenges. Rather, most troubling to Joanne, particularly over the last year, has been the problems she has faced dealing with the other girls in the village.

There’s some older girls... Some of them just don’t like me because they think I’m messing around with their boyfriend. They try to talk about me. They try to put me down, but I know they can’t do that because they don’t know anything about me. I never even hung out with them. They try to make friends with me like after they thought that me and their boyfriend were messing around. I never wanted to be friends with them after that or deal with their drama anymore.

Several of Joanne’s friends have attempted suicide in response to very negative experiences with other girls ‘going against them.’ Joanne instead has been able to get through these hard times, and out of the experience, has developed a strong sense of herself as a Yup’ik girl through her connection to family and kinship relationships.

I got through it because I don’t think I had any doubts in myself. When my mom said we were going to do this, we’re going to do that, I didn’t have any doubt in myself. So I think that’s what made me get through it.

Her older brothers, grandparents and mom play a critical role in her transition to becoming a woman. Joanne has identified and adopted strategies that make use of the close kinship ties valued within traditional Yup’ik culture to offer her protection and safety as well as role models of strength.

Joel—Joel is 17 years old and is in the 11th grade. Joel’s parents are married and he has two younger sisters, a younger brother and an older brother. Joel likes to be outside, riding his snowmachine or boating. Joel has grown-up hunting and fishing with his uncles, cousins, and his father and mother. A normal day for Joel looks like this:

I get up at 7am and then get ready for school, and go to school. I was late for class and I went to go get a late slip and then stayed in school. After school I got dragged out to go check the [under ice fishing] net and then went home. I was going to go check my friend, I told him I was going to meet him and then when I went to go check him, he wasn’t there. So I went to my grandpa’s to go pick up my sister. After I picked her up, I dropped her off. I went home and stayed home and watched TV for about one hour and then I went out to the Eskimo dance and from there I went home and to sleep.

For Joel the best things about living in the village are hunting, basketball, and being around his grandparents. When things get stressful for Joel he goes to his grandfather's house. He 'never even has to say anything' and his grandfather will know when something is bothering him.

I don't even have to talk to him. He talks to me. Every time I go to his house, he always finds something to talk to me about. Stuff may be on my mind but I don't talk to anybody about any of my problems and then all of a sudden my grandpa, it's like he can read my mind, read what I'm thinking, but he all of a sudden just talks about it and then I feel a little bit better but not as good as how I really was but I don't know. Sometimes he always just all of a sudden talks about things.

For Joel, both the best and worst times of his growing-up have involved experiences with his father. Joel remembers when his dad and mom used to drink, and his dad would physically fight with him and his mother. Joel would sometimes try and stop his dad from becoming violent, and these were some of the hardest times for Joel. There were always the good times though too, like when his dad wasn't drinking or had episodically quit drinking, and during these times, his father would include Joel in important subsistence and household activities.

I used to not only help my dad with [snow] machines, but I used to help him set the nets, traps, and go out rabbit hunting. In the summer we would go set net where the strong currents are and try to catch some food for my grandma.

I haven't caught my first mukluk [seal] yet and it's been one whole year I've been going out to the coast where we could hunt and I had really lot of fun. The first day I went there, we hunted mukluk [seal] for six hours. My uncles are still bringing me out so I could try and catch my first big animal. I've only been catching birds since I started hunting.

For Yup'ik boys who are Joel's age, catching a seal is an important marker of manhood and male social status. For some boys today, this can be a significant source of stress among families who lack a boat and the resources to take boys out hunting. But Joel is well connected to family members, and to his uncles in particular, who have the resources and the equipment, as well as possess the values and the willingness to prioritize taking their young nephew out hunting and fishing. Joe's uncles recognized this as both an important kinship responsibility for them, and as an important element of Joel's education as a young man, something that they experienced in their own relationships with uncles as boys. This example of a community and kinship-system process fostering resilience is replayed frequently in this community.

Even with a relatively secure connection to Yup'ik subsistence life in place, lack of opportunities to get out on the land is a primary source of stress for Joel and other boys his age. Joel views everyday life in the village as "boring" and struggles to stay in school, stay away from alcohol and marijuana, and stay out of trouble in the community.

I know my parents didn't raise me the way some other parents raise their kids. I was raised to be better than some of these other guys because I know my parents didn't want me to grow up like some of these other kids who grew up mischief.

That's how they grew up. And I found a lot of it too growing up. Too much of it actually. The mischief is still trying to follow me.

'Mischief' is a local term used to describe risk-taking/defiant behavior engaged by young people in the village. Mischief often includes staying out past community curfew, vandalism, underage substance use (primarily smoking cigarettes and/or marijuana or drinking alcohol), racing snowmachines and ATVs, and "messing around" (sexually-active behavior). Mischief is engaged in a peer group context, and the pressure to participate in mischief can be overwhelming for young people with more limited alternatives for friends and fun. But Joel has options both in terms of resources and social connections. He can go out on his snowmachine, or by boat in the summer. He can keep hunting for his first mukluk (seal), often with the assistance of his uncles. He can help his father or go visit his grandfather. And his parent's and relatives have communicated to him clear sets of expectations, "I was raised to be better." Joel's life is not without hardship and risk, but his experiences growing-up provided by these family and community structures of resilience strengthened his sense of purpose and meaning in life—his reasons for living.

I mean growing up I had a lot of chances to die. I almost got shot with a shotgun. If I would have stuck my head out a little bit, I would have had no head. I wouldn't have been here. I would have been in a grave right now. So I had a lot of chances to die, but I'm still alive. Still trying.

Local Conceptual Categories and Connections: Modified Grounded Theory Analysis—The life history narratives reveal terms and concepts used by Yup'ik youth to describe stressors and resilience strategies. Terms like "drinking," "parents," "fighting," "drama," "boring," and "mischief" were used to talk about stressors. Other terms like "getting through," "going out," "hunting," "brothers," "uncles," "grandparents," and "parents" were used to talk about strategies and resources for dealing with challenges. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the local terms that youth use to talk about their lives and experiences. These terms point to the larger conceptual categories guiding everyday decision-making and behavior of youth in the village.

We utilized ATLAS.ti to explore the connections between the coding categories. These results indicate important relationships between youth resilience strategies and community, cultural-contextual, and environmental resources accessed in the resilience process. We generated co-occurrence indices of our focused codes with three emergent theoretical categories—*local stressors* along with *strategies for being well and strong* and *getting through hard times*, both part of "Yup'ik youth resilience,"—to explore the degree of association between each focused code in our codebook and these emergent overarching categories. Findings are presented in Table 2.

Local stressors were coded for events or ongoing circumstances that presented challenges, or caused harm and adverse responses among youth in our study. "Lifetime" was used to identify something as a long-term and essentially life-long circumstance, and highlights how all three emergent conceptual categories are indicative of people, events, and circumstances with enduring significance. The "lifetime" code was more highly associated with *local stressors* than with *strategies for being well and strong*, while it displayed nearly an

equivalent degree of co-occurrence with *getting through hard times*. Codes highly associated with *local stressors* included “boredom,” “bullying/gossip,” “boyfriends,” “dealing with feelings,” “going to school,” “discipline,” and “parents.”

Unsurprisingly, “when parents drink” and “when kids drink” were among the most highly co-occurring codes with *local stressors*. Youth identified “when parents drink” as being the most common, but not necessarily the most distressing challenge in their growing-up experience in the community. “Grandparents” and “not making it worse” were associated most often with “when parents drink” as ways for *getting through hard times*.

Another highly associated code with *local stressors* was “dealing with feelings.” “Dealing with feelings” was coded when youth would talk in their interviews about being bored, getting angry, being alone, feeling sad, losing somebody, breaking-up, and going against each other.

Of particular note are divergences in the magnitude of the co-occurrence statistic among certain codes in their associations with *strategies for being well and strong* and *getting through hard times*. Codes highly associated with *getting through hard times* involved both resources such as “friends/cousins” as well as adaptive strategies like “not making it worse.” *Getting through hard times* associated more frequently with *local stressors*, and was associated with codes indicative of experiences of adversity, such as “loss,” “dealing with feelings,” and “when parents drink.” In addition, some people and events may have a dual role as both a stressor and resource in the lives of youth. These codes included “friends/cousins,” “going to school” and “parents.”

Codes highly associated with *strategies for being well and strong* included “subsistence” “sports,” “having fun,” “self,” “grandparents,” and “Yup’ik culture.” Youth talked about these as ways for keeping themselves happy and feeling good. *Strategies for being well and strong* represent protective factors and inherent strengths in individuals, families, and communities. One category that co-occurred highly with both *strategies for being well and strong* and *getting through hard times* was the “grandparents” code. Youth talked about grandparents as both *strategies for being well and strong* and as a way of *getting through hard times*. “Siblings” and especially older siblings emerged similarly as a resource across both resilience categories, as well as being an occasional stressor. In summary, the co-occurrence analysis suggests *getting through hard times* represents resources for coping and crisis management strategies, while *strategies for being well and strong* indicate resources for well-being and preventative strategies.

Finally, certain terms and themes associate with all three conceptual categories. For example, “friends/cousins,” “parents” and “school” have the most potential to be both acutely stressful but also critically helpful. For example, friends could become sources of stress when they are gossiping or go against each other, but they can also be important resources when parents are drinking. Young people had to, at various times, consider the risks and the benefits of accessing certain resources (friends, parents, school) and adapt their decision-making as circumstances change (friends forgive them, parents stop drinking, a new teacher comes into the school). This finding demonstrates the often complex, context

dependent, and environmentally contingent nature of Yup'ik resilience processes. Given how the same people, dependent on context and circumstance, can represent either risk or protection, growing up for the youth in this community requires acute sensitivity to contextual indicators, along with for many, ongoing elements of risk-taking and cost-benefit calculation.

Discussion

Our discussion links these findings related to contemporary youth experiences of adversity and resilience in this Yup'ik community back to the current literature, and adds an understanding of critical cultural-contextual and community resilience factors to the growing knowledge base focused around achieving successful indigenous youth development. We discuss limitations of the study both in terms of methods and generalizability, and suggest next steps towards a goal of actionable and serviceable research in the arctic focusing on youth resilience, effective prevention and treatment services, and effective social policy.

Contemporary Yup'ik Youth Experiences of Stress and Resilience: Learning How to Live and be Yup'ik in the New Arctic

The introduction to this paper described some of the many ways the arctic today looks and feels very different than it once did for young people growing up in the remote village communities. The composite narratives presented above detail a life lived not out on the land, facing the obstacles and uncertainty of nature, but rather a life lived in a settled village, facing the obstacles and uncertainties of settlement and social life. The contemporary Yup'ik youth experience, and the terms and conceptual frames of reference used by youth to negotiate their transition to adulthood, are unfamiliar and at times even threatening to their elder generations. Even the physical environment that youth must learn to navigate has changed from what their own grandparents experienced (Bodenhorn, 1988; Chance, 1990; Condon, 1988; Brody, 1977; Fienup-Riordan, 2000; Graburn, 1969; Hinzman et al., 2005). Ice conditions, once knowable to the learned Yup'ik eye, have turned foreign and unpredictable, much like the youth themselves. In Yup'ik communities, it is common to have the eldest generation speaking monolingual Yup'ik, while the younger generations are being raised as monolingual English speakers.

Yup'ik Youth Local Stressors in a Colonial Stress Model

Much of the colonial stress literature with indigenous peoples focuses on trauma as an outcome of disruption to a system of traditional social and cultural processes through contact (Braveheart, 1998; Duran & Duran, 1995; O'Neil, 1986). But it is not only this forced disruption of social ecological systems, often accompanied by human rights violations, which create trauma experience. The dysregulating effects of this disruption extends to the functioning of the traditional social and cultural processes meant to keep things connected and meaningful, constituting both a historical and an ongoing contemporary set of social determinants, pointing to a need to understand these historical cultural losses as stressors within broader ecological and indigenous stress process models (Walls & Whitbeck, 2012).

There has been considerable recent attention in the developmental literature about the role of these types of social processes, and cultural variation within them, in the development of social understanding and self-regulation (e.g., Sokol, Carpendale, Young, & Iarocci, 2010). Disruption of these systems interferes with the social processes that address and explain stressful things like strong feelings, illnesses, social discord, bad luck, and misfortune—within a traditional explanatory framework and context. Our data from this Yup'ik community suggests this is in operation currently, in the emphasis youth place on feelings and lack of resources for dealing with feelings.

Other researchers have described consequences of this colonial legacy for young indigenous people in the arctic using a model of cultural continuity rather than colonial stress (e.g., Kirmayer, Sehdev, Whitely, Dandeneau, & Issac, 2009). A powerful contribution to this literature is Chandler and Proulx's (2006) examination of cultural continuity and its protective relationship in prevention of Inuit youth suicide in the Canadian Arctic. They define cultural continuity in terms of social connection, including local control of community institutions and decision-making, and conclude that:

...if owing to some long train of collective mishaps (colonialism, for example) where communities are made to lose track of themselves in time, and so suffer some disconnect with their past or future, then old responsibilities fly out the window and life becomes cheap. (p. 139)

It is clear from the alarmingly high regional rates of suicide and alcohol-related health consequences among Yup'ik, and in particular among Yup'ik youth (Allen, Levintova, & Mohatt, 2011), that the terms of survival have changed; and many of the traditional protective processes for youth have broken down. "Protective communities," Chandler and Proulx (2006) argue, "situate their members in time, by conveying to them a sense of continuity with their collective past, and by providing them with a believable stake in the future." When whole communities come to question their own survival or persistence, a common outcome of colonialism for indigenous peoples, "then a sense of ownership of the past is easily lost, and the future (because it no longer seems one's own) loses much of its consequentiality" (p. 139). Chandler and Proulx provide a powerful explanatory model that can be tested by looking closely at the lives and experiences of indigenous young people in the arctic who are actively finding ways to stay connected socially to their community, get through hard times, and find ways to be well and keep strong.

Contemporary Yup'ik Community and Cultural Resilience

Our findings show among young people growing-up in the Yup'ik villages today, in addition to coping and resilience on the individual level, the leveraging of a number of additional resources on multiple levels that provide strong protective capacities. These resources, along with the strategies to access them, constitute resilience processes organized at the community and cultural level to build strengths and protection in young people, and to foster healthy and adaptive development. One particularly noteworthy example of community resilience processes includes the formal and informal community structures that support hunting and other traditional subsistence activities. These activities continue to play a critical role in a sociocultural process determining the ways that young people are

provided skills and knowledge important both for survival, and as exemplified in our opening quote, important for the formation of meaning, identity, and cultural connection as a lived process. As a resilience process, these structures promote linkages across a network of people, events, and shared settings to distribute and transform resources across the networks. The activities also promote cultural continuity; as community resilience process they enable maintenance of similar structure and functioning on the community and cultural level in the face of adversity and rapid social change.

Limitations

This study sample is limited to a small group of youth, from one Alaska Native community, from one distinct Alaska Native cultural group, and from one period of time. Similarly, our methods were limited to those deemed most appropriate within the context of this community and culture, and involved primarily self-report and narrative forms of data collection. Our aim was to understand the experience of growing-up in a Yup'ik community from the perspective of a youth in the process of making this transition to adulthood. This aim has necessarily limited us in the questions we asked, so as to hear with clarity the youth voice in the matter. Finally, we are limited to the perspective of youth in our description, and we have no long-term longitudinal data on actual youth outcomes to verify the nature of these processes as resilient.

Directions for Future Research

All youth experience is becoming increasingly globalized and homogenized (Arnett, 2002), and this experience extends to indigenous groups (Hall & Fenelon, 2008). While Yup'ik youth in our study were accessing resources and strategies specific to their unique ecological contexts, they were very often doing so for reasons similar to youth in other parts of the world. Next steps in this work include deeper examination of areas that have emerged as potentially important for distinction including differences between the narratives of Yup'ik boys and Yup'ik girls and differences marked by developmental stage at the time of the interview. Of particular note is how our analysis marked a distinction between getting through hard times and strategies for being well and strong. Strategies for being well and strong were more attuned to fostering long term well-being and enhancing adaptive capacities within the individual by drawing upon community level structures embedded in the indigenous culture. Getting through hard times aligned more with ways of coping and management of crisis. Not all strategies for being well and strong are useful for getting through hard times in an immediate sense. Strategies for being well and strong are long-term, and we were limited in this study by not being able to follow-up with these youth to understand more how long-term processes develop resilience and capacities for living.

Conclusions

Youth resilience in a contemporary Yup'ik context involves the development of social and cultural connectedness within a supportive network of kinship relationships and enduring cultural traditions and practices. For Yup'ik youth getting through hard times today, this requires opportunities provided by family and community structures to create and maintain a meaningful connectedness. These connections include human relationships, particularly cross-generationally and those relations with elders, as well as connections to the land and

the animals, and connections to those things that collectively instruct on strategies for being well and strong, or in local terms, the “ways to live.”

Growing-up Yup'ik today involves a complex process of connecting to the past, present, and future in ways meaningful for both youth as well as older members of the cultural group who will accompany them in successfully coming of age. Key primary contexts where this can happen function as community resilience processes in Yup'ik communities, where the generational distinctions fall away and people co-exist in time and connect across social boundaries with a collective will to continue on.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

This work could not have been done without the strong support and involvement of members of the project community. We honor the youth, parents, and all of the aunts, uncles and grandparents for their commitment to the health of the people. This research was funded by the National Science Foundation Office of Polar Programs ARC-00756211 and ARC-00756211 Amendment 001 and 002, and the National Center for Research Resources [P20RR061430].

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Focused Codes	Definition	Selective Codes	Example
<i>Local Stressors</i>	References to the hard times or the challenges that the participant has experienced or that other young people experience in the community.	other girls, drama, rumors and gossip, break-ups, siblings, being left alone, parents drinking, friends drinking, parents fighting, boredom, teachers, not having a dad, friends trying to “let me” drink (peer pressure), school, teasing, going to school, loss	Int: School is a challenge, just certain ones. F: Yes and the other challenges are dealing with other girls here in Alakamuk. There’s some older girls. Some of them just don’t like me because they think I’m trying to be with their boyfriend and I don’t like it. But I deal with them. They try to talk about me. They try to put me down, They try to make friends with me like after they thought that me and their boyfriend were messing around. I never wanted to be friends with them. (44:13)
<i>Getting through hard times</i>	References to active coping, overcoming obstacles, or dealing with daily challenges and crises. Includes references to difficult times and the ways these were overcome.	“getting over it,” moving away, leaving the setting, talking to mom, going to my grandparents, not doubting oneself, talking to friends, remembering or thinking about people you love or people that love you, not making it worse	F: I got through it because I don’t think I had any doubts in myself. When my mom said we were going to this, we’re going to do that, I didn’t have any doubt in myself. So I think that’s what made me get through it. (44:13)
<i>Strategies for being well</i>	References to keeping yourself healthy – doing things that keep yourself feeling good. Includes references to things that protect and sustain wellbeing	taking care of other people, subsistence (hunting/being out on the land), grandparents, Yup’ik culture, having fun, playing sports, going to school	M. Every days been a good day. Int: That’s good. So what could have made it better? M. I don’t know. Maybe hunting or something – to go out. But my grandpa noticed that someone tries to break in when no one will be watching the house. It’s like my job to watch the house. That’s what’s boring. At least though I got a good job watching the house. (31:22)

Figure 1.

Examples from Yup’ik site codebook: Theoretical coding and definitions built upon focused coding of text examples

Table 1

Yup'ik Youth Terms Describing Stress and Resilience

Yup'ik youth terms of "stress"	Yup'ik youth terms of "resilience"
Bum feelings" (anger, sadness, boredom, shame) (from gossiping, bullying, parent's drinking, boyfriends, boredom, etc) "Nothing to do" "Can't go no where" "Losing my culture" (or love, or friends, or life) "Drinking people" (parents, family members, friends, self) "Going to school/school is hard"	"Being out" - Hunting/fishing/camping/traveling/moving "Feeling good/excited" "Being with people"/not being alone (parents, family, siblings, grandparents, friends) "Helping my (dad, mom, auntie, grandpa, little brother, etc) "Belief in myself" "Going to school/school is fun"

Table 2

Co-occurrence Index of Focused Codes with Three Selected Emergent Theoretical Categories

Codes	Local Stressors	Getting through things	Strategies for being well and strong
Lifetime	.21	.19	.14
Boredom	.07	.05	.01
Bullying/Gossip	.09	.09	.03
Having fun	.04	.03	.12
Hope/Thinking about the future	.05	.02	.05
Language	.02	.02	.04
Loss	.04	.10	.02
Role models	.01	.00	.06
Belief in Self	.07	.05	.13
Subsistence	.01	.01	.12
Aunts/Uncles	.06	.06	.05
Boyfriends	.09	.05	.01
Dealing with feelings	.21	.18	.08
Discipline	.09	.07	.06
Friends/cousins	.16	.16	.09
Girlfriends	.01	.00	.01
Going to school	.16	.11	.07
Grandparents	.08	.11	.13
Not making things worse	.08	.11	.02
Parents	.17	.15	.10
Rumors/gossip	.07	.03	.00
Siblings	.09	.10	.08
Sports	.02	.02	.10
Taking care of others	.04	.03	.08
Teachers	.06	.05	.02
When parents drink	.12	.22	.04
When kids drink	.08	.05	.05
Yup'ik culture	.02	.02	.11
Local Stressors	—	.31	.1
Getting through hard times	.31	—	.03
Strategies for wellbeing	.1	.03	—