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Mapping Resilience Pathways of Indigenous Youth in Five Circumpolar Communities

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Abstract

This introduction to the special issue *Indigenous Youth Resilience in the Arctic* reviews relevant resilience theory and research, with particular attention to Arctic Indigenous youth. The role of social determinants and community resilience processes in Indigenous circumpolar settings are overviewed, as are emergent Indigenous resilience frameworks. The distinctive role for qualitative inquiry in understanding these frameworks is emphasized, as is the uniquely informative lens youth narratives offer in understanding Indigenous, cultural, and community resilience processes during times of social transition. We then describe key elements of the Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood study cross-site methods, including sampling, design, procedures, and analytic strategies.

Keywords

Arctic; indigenous; qualitative; resilience; adolescence

Mapping Resilience Pathways of Indigenous Youth in Five Circumpolar Communities

Cultural change and social transformation occur in any society, but their pace and reach can vary considerably. Circumpolar Indigenous people are responding to rapid changes affecting their core political, economic, and cultural systems. This study looks at young people growing-up in five such communities, seeking to identify the stressors that make for difficult passages and the resilience processes that safeguard transition into adulthood. Using collaborative and interdisciplinary methods of inquiry, the Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood (CIPA) project seeks to analyze qualitative life history narratives of youth from Northeastern Siberian Eveny, Northern Norwegian Sámi, Northeastern Canada Inuit, Northwestern Alaska Inupiat, and Southwestern Alaska Yup'ik communities. The study aims to explore how sweeping transitions and globalization are affecting young people's lives, and the ways these communities shape youth resilience as they face and overcome these unique challenges (Kirmayer, 2006). Study of resilience processes in adolescence can also provide keys to understanding broader sociocultural tensions that often come into focus during many of the developmental tasks young people navigate on the pathway to adulthood. In this way, the narratives of youth coming of age in circumpolar communities hold potential to also tell a still-evolving story of cultural continuity wrested from disruptive colonial legacies. Youth experience can provide a lens with which to explore ways certain resilience processes might remain deeply patterned within traditional cultural practices, alongside with new emergent strategies representing innovations.

In addition to its developmental emphasis and international, interdisciplinary scope, the current study is distinguished by a commitment to principles of community based participatory research (CBPR). The work at each study site is rooted in long-standing research relationships that span a decade or longer, and that predate this current project. This time invested in the research relationship positions our research group to tap multilevel understandings of local resilience processes, brought into sharp relief through young people's stories of challenge and accomplishment. Familial and community resources are defined and bound together in these accounts, along with the improvisations of inventive young people and their allies. This allows exploration of both culture-specific elements of resilience processes, as well as commonalities and divergences across sites.

Indigenous participants, local institutions, and community co-researchers functioned as collaborative partners with our interdisciplinary, international team of university researchers throughout all phases of this project. The research was initiated through a local process at each site, culminating in a circumpolar consensus meeting with youth and adult community representatives that arrived at a shared core set of cross-site research questions (Ulturgasheva et al., 2010). Interviewing, data collection, and analytic procedures at each site involved shared university and community co-researcher direction. Provisional local findings were disseminated back to each community, where community co-researchers provided interpretive guidance. With an eye to sustainability, this project is also intended to build local community research capacity, and to gather baseline data for future prospective inquiry that will follow this group of research participants through adulthood.

This introduction to the special issue *Indigenous Youth Resilience in the Arctic* reviews relevant resilience theory and research, with particular attention to Arctic Indigenous youth. It then describes elements of the cross-site methodology shared across the sites of the Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood (CIPA) study. The five papers that follow each make use of flexibility also built into this shared methodology, allowing distinct, site-specific, and highly localized portraits of resilience processes in each international community. These portraits afford views of the stressors and resources shaping culturally patterned resilience processes emergent through life histories of Indigenous young people, analyzed by age group (early and late adolescence) and gender. A sixth paper compares stressors and resilience strategies across sites, tracing the influence of diverse cross-national educational and social policies. We believe the series can be usefully drawn upon to guide future collaborative, interdisciplinary, international research, to inform Arctic social policy, and to support Indigenous efforts promoting youth resilience across the circumpolar north.

Contemporary Perspectives on Circumpolar Indigenous Youth Resilience

Rapid social change, attended by colonial and disenfranchising intrusions, has resulted in significant social problems across the circumpolar Arctic. These profound changes have occurred largely in the past 50 years, and have resulted in significant behavioral health disparities for Indigenous young people, and especially young men, along with widespread social concern, associated with substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide as profiled through a broadly interdisciplinary literature¹. Yet, despite these mounting disparities and inequities in health outcomes when contrasted to majority national populations, large numbers of Indigenous circumpolar youth successfully navigate the passage into adulthood. Understanding how communities across the circumpolar North make such passages feasible has immense implications for prevention, treatment, and social policy in the arctic.

Coinciding with these disruptive changes in the Arctic, over these same 50 years, an important body of interdisciplinary work has emerged to examine what contributes to healthy development and well-being in the face of adversity (Luthar, 2006; Luthar & Brown, 2007; Masten, 2007). A common definition of the phenomenon, termed resilience, was established a decade ago as a “dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543). This approach distinguishes between risk, vulnerability, and protection (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Luthar et al., 2000): risk refers broadly to adverse circumstances experienced by a collective; vulnerability to features of history, practice or circumstance that intensify risk; and protection describes factors that enhance resilience by reducing risk or buffering its effects.

¹This includes a broad general literature on circumpolar social change and behavioral health concerns (Condon, 1990; Doak & Nachmann, 1987; Jilek-Aall, 1988; L. Kirmayer, Boothroyd, & Hodgins, 1998; Kvernmo & Heyerdahl, 2003; O’Neil, 1986), as well as literature specific to Eveny in Siberia (Bogoyavlensky, 1997; Pika, 1993, 1999; Prokhorov, 1987; Rethman, 2001; Vitebsky, 2000, 2002, 2006), Sámi in Norway (Silviken, Haldorsen & Kvernmo, 2006; Spein, 2008), Inuit in Canada (Damas, 2002; Kral et al., 2009; Kral, 2012; Murry & Brody, 1999; O’Neil, 1986; Rigby, MacDonald, & Otak, 2000; Tester & McNicoll, 2004), and Inupiaq and Yup’ik in Alaska (Wexler, 2006; 2009; Wexler, Hill, Bertone-Johnson & Fenaughty, 2008; Wexler, Silveira, & Bertone-Johnson, In press; Alaska Injury Prevention Center, Critical Illness and Trauma Foundation Inc., & American Society for Suicidology, 2007; J. Allen, Levintoya, & Mohatt, 2011; Hendin, Maltzberger, Lipschitz, Haas, & Kyle, 2001; Perkins, Sanddal, Howell, Sanddal, & Berman, 2009). This literature also includes several reviews of substance abuse, violence, and suicide in the Arctic (Allen, Levintoya, et al., 2011; Berry, 1985; Bjerregaard, 2001; Chandler & Proulx, 2006; Condon, 1990; Kettl & Bixler, 1991; Kirmayer, Fletcher, & Boothroyd, 1998; Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000; Kvernmo & Heyerdahl, 2003; Larsen 1992; Lyng, 1985; Oosten & Remie, 1999; Sanson-Fisher, Campbell, Perkins, Blunden, & Davis, 2006).

In contrast to psychiatry and its allied disciplines, resilience is construed differently by systems biology and ecology through a usage predating its appearance in the human development literature. In ecology, resilience is more broadly understood as “the capacity of a social-ecological system *to maintain similar structure, functioning, and feedbacks* despite shocks and perturbations” (Chapin, Matson, & Vitousek, 2011, p. 19; emphasis added²). These broad interdisciplinary physical science roots influenced the development of an ecological-transactional model of human resilience (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993), which views the human context (culture, community, kinship, and family) as nested levels of influence that shape resilience processes. The ecological model underscores the significance of contextual factors operating at varying levels of proximity to the individual. These understandings challenge researchers to conceive of resilience beyond the individual level, which has typically focused on such phenomenon as personality traits or life events. That these types of multilevel understandings of resilience are necessary becomes clear when we note that focusing on the individual level alone typically accounts for less than half the variance in the outcomes of youth (e.g., Beckett et al., 2006; Sroufe et al., 2005). Accordingly, ecological approaches stress how both ontogenetic development and adaptation on the individual level are shaped by contextual factors operating at multiple levels, which in turn means that the transactions that define resilience entail application of local resources to meet specific local challenges. Because resource utility depends not only on their local availability and accessibility, but also on the ways in which these resources are freighted with meaning, resilience as a process will vary significantly as a function of differences in value systems and worldviews (Kirmayer, Sehdev, Whitely, Dandeneau, & Issac, 2009; White & Ellison, 2007).

Ungar (2011) notes that “study of resilience should involve context first and the child second” because “positive outcomes are mostly the result of facilitative environments that provide children with the potential to do well” (p. 4). He describes four principles implicit in ecological understandings of resilience – decentrality, complexity, atypicality, and cultural relativity – that can guide a study of context. *Decentrality* reinforces the shift in focus from the individual to broader social ecological levels of understanding. Decentrality is congruent with Masten’s (2001) distinction between ‘resiliency’ as individual internal trait and ‘resilience’ as multilevel process (Cicchetti & Curtis, 2007). Mindful of this distinction, our gaze shifts to seek out the processes and practices – their timing, triggering mechanisms, titrating of intensity and duration, ability to adjust – by means of which environments provide resources for strategic use.

With *complexity*, Ungar (2011) underscores what it takes to make resources useable—available, accessible, and meaningful to the actors in question—and that their effective uptake requires meshing with the actors’ aptitudes and capacities, as well as those of associates or peers. Complexity also recognizes that effective assemblies of actors are not fixed, but instead change “as individuals move between contexts and through time” (p. 7). Stated differently, we must attend to interactive functions and their ripple effects across complex systems. Complexity reinforces the organizing principle of decentrality, that environmental

²We emphasize this feature from ecology because it materially qualifies and extends our understanding beyond that of adaptation in ways that will prove valuable when considering concepts such as cultural continuity later in this discussion.

factors beyond the individual level are overriding determinants in resilience. The implicit relational perspective in both principles is magnified within the tight, kinship-based organizational structures of many Indigenous communities (Allen, Mohatt, Markstrom, Novins, & Byers, 2011).

Atypicality recognizes what can appear as unusual behavior judged from without, may instead prove contextually relevant and adaptive within certain settings. This can be of particular relevance in the unique physical and social environmental contexts in the Arctic. Understanding how ‘unusual’ behavior patterns may be locally functional in a distinctively configured cultural ecology, when alternative and more conventional pathways to development are blocked, may be critical to understanding resilience in circumpolar contexts. Other researchers have described ways childhood and adolescence is at times reconfigured around achievement of the means to survive in contemporary inner-city communities in New York and Brazil (Bourgois, 2002; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1999). Young people in these communities engage in activities that to the majority, mainstream would appear risky and adverse, activities like drug-dealing and defense-training. For youth in these communities though, there are few other paths to protection of self, family and community. The long-term costs of such pathways, through penalties exacted when certain development milestones are bypassed, may need to be assessed.

Finally, *cultural relativity* recognizes that ontological development beyond basic biopsychosocial events, such as the timing of secondary sexual characteristics in puberty, varies culturally. Relativity takes the atypicality principle – “when the benchmarks for ... development are defined locally” – and complicates it further in multicultural settings, where “competing truth claims of ... intersecting cultures” contend (p. 9). Relativity folds in on itself when globalization’s “homogenizing effects” intersect with once-unquestioned local cultural practice (Appadurai, 1996). Relativity, along with the principle of complexity, suggests the very appreciation of resilience may be a function of the social location from which it is viewed. Thus, resilience in specific cultural groups may involve a choice to resist dominant cultural norms in favor of Indigenous coping strategies, as Indigenous communities invoke acts of opposition in response to colonial domination (Tousignant & Sioui, 2009; Wexler, DiFulvio & Burke, 2009). These acts of resistance may be practiced subtly, through deliberate cultivation of cultural continuity, or directly, through organized efforts of opposition.

Social Determinants of Resilience in Indigenous Circumpolar Settings

Ecological inquiry also feeds naturally into the social determinants of health (Marmot & Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2007), and these take distinctive shape in the circumpolar north. With respect to Indigenous peoples’ health (Gracey & King, 2009; King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009), any examination of social determinants must begin with the ongoing and lingering impacts of colonization. This experience includes historical and contemporary examples of marginalization, exclusion, cultural suppression, forced assimilation (e.g., removal of children to residential boarding schools), and outright extermination. Coupled with this legacy are practices of racism, discrimination, and demeaning portrayals of Indigenous people in popular media and social discourse. Myriad

social policies have widespread impact on Indigenous people's sense of connection to their land and its co-inhabitants, historically a crucial component of individual and collective identity. These policies foster dependency on the state, mandate schooling and year-round settlements, and marginalize traditional roles and livelihoods, and their cumulative effect is to erode health (Wexler, 2009). This shared and particular set of social determinants constitutes a central consideration in multilevel ecological understandings of resilience in Indigenous circumpolar settings. The historical process associated with colonization and its accompanying oppression has created patterns of unrelenting and persistent health inequalities (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011).

Numerous studies identify an association between cultural disruption, acculturation stress, identity struggle, and the health disparities in circumpolar communities (Berry, 1985; Bjerregaard, 2001; Chance, 1990; Kirmayer, Fletcher, et al., 1998; Larsen 1992; O'Neil, 1986; Stairs, 1992). Other research suggests linkages between cultural continuity, enculturation, community control and action as resilience processes fostering well-being for Indigenous populations³. While these studies identify connections between cultural disruption and negative outcomes, and between cultural continuity and positive outcomes, they have yet to provide a coherent theoretical framework for understanding their relations. We lack multilevel models of how the navigation of competing Indigenous and dominant cultural expectations occurs in adolescence, how this process is supported by factors both within and beyond the individual, and how it is made sense of locally. These gaps in the existing research underscore the potential contribution of the current study to the knowledge base on Indigenous young people.

Local variations among a common set of social determinants across the circumpolar north directs our attention to specific resilience processes that draw upon distinctive bodies of traditional knowledge, values, and practices. The principle of cultural relativity prepares us to see the deployment of resources as both subtle and poignant: as the living legacy of tradition on the one hand, and as modes of resistance/accommodation to the evolving entanglements of both dominant societies and larger globalizing forces, on the other.

Community Resilience Frameworks in Indigenous Contexts

Lafrance, Bodor, and Bastien (2008) note striking correspondences between Indigenous worldviews and ecological theories of resilience. Their review constructs a resilience framework underscoring the roles of family, identity, and cultural formation within a relational worldview in which spirit world, nature, community, family, and individuals are intimately joined, moving understanding of resilience to the community level. An important element of community resilience in Indigenous contexts, then, can be comprehended as flexible structures of cultural continuity enacted in innovative ways in response to new demands (Kirmayer et al., 2009). As noted earlier, psychiatry, psychology, public health, and the social sciences describe resilience as “adaptation in the face of adversity” (Masten,

³Several studies explore these linkages and review this literature (Adelson, 2000; Berlin, 1987; Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland, & Blum, 1999; M. J. Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Chandler & Lalonde, 2009; EchoHawk, 1997; Ann Fienup-Riordan, 2002; Herbert & McCannell, 1997; Kral & Idlout, 2008; Minore, Boone, Katt, & Kinch, 1991; Paproski, 1997; Phinney, 1991; Roberts & Holmes, 1999; Tatz, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1997; Warry, 1998; Wexler, 2006; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004; J. White & Jodoin, 2004).

2007). In contrast, these emerging frameworks from Indigenous settings, paralleling the ecological view within systems biology, emphasize the capacity of systems to maintain similar structure and function, despite assault and perturbations.

Drawing upon emerging resilience literature from collaborative research in Inuit, Metis, Mi'kmaq and Mohawk communities, Kirmayer et al. (2011) and Kirmayer et al. (2009) explore these structural and functional elements in community resilience. As just a few examples, formally, common vehicles of expression included metaphor, ritual, and storytelling. Substantively, a broad range of purposive activity included choreographing reconciliation ceremonies, promoting self-regulation through alignment with larger mythic structures, re-telling traumatic histories in ways that valorize collective identity, and reclaiming symbolic culture for purposes of healing, life narrative, and the transmission of heritage. The multiple factors considered include family relations, oral traditions and storytelling, connection to the land, traditional healing practices, and spirituality and ceremony. They also involve cultural identity, knowledge, and continuity, and finally, collective and political agency. This literature highlights a saliency of cultural continuity absent in the adaptation characterizations of resilience still prominent in mainstream health and social science literature. It also requires us to conceptualize resilience processes as system events (e.g., as complex interactions between community structures and functions). Further, this emergent literature also encourages exploration of the imaginative work and social mechanisms driving complexity in resilience processes. This includes new and novel influences such as globalization and hybridization, as well as the creative involvement of youth in determining their own destinies and futures.

Mapping Complexity in Circumpolar Indigenous Resilience Processes

These emerging frameworks parallel recent developments in interdisciplinary systems approaches to resilience through their shared exploration of multiple domains within and outside the developing person (Cicchetti & Blender, 2004; Curtis & Cicchetti, 2003; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2007). The influence of ecologically-informed approaches is unmistakable in this literature's growing insistence on viewing resilience as "process or phenomenon ... not ... trait" (Schoon, 2006, p.16); resilience is seen neither fixed nor static, but instead recurrently activated. Risk or challenge, then, takes two main forms: staged transitions (culturally prescribed and orchestrated), and unscheduled events and conditions (episodic or chronic stressors). Other important phenomena in current views of resilience include broad influences of developmental cascades, which are "the cumulative consequences for development of the many interactions and transactions occurring in developing systems that result in spreading effects across levels, among domains at the same level, and across different systems or generations" (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010, p. 491). Cascade effects broadly influence responses to future challenges, while the complementary concept of ripple effects collaterally impact other life areas.

Recognition of the context-specificity of both risk and protective processes underscores the need to assess resilience across multiple domains, positions us to expect cross-cultural variation, and alerts us to "risk modifiers that tend to be highly robust across widely disparate cultural contexts *and* those more idiosyncratic to particular settings" (Luthar &

Zelazo, 2003, p. 525). Research on social determinants of health reminds us that resources for buffering stress, navigating transitions, and mobilizing support mimic patterns of social inequality at large, making for substantial inequities in the distribution of resilience-relevant assets. Finally, values and context-dependency enter into what constitutes good outcome or positive adjustment (Masten, 1999).

Both historical legacy and social moment figure into contextualizing risk, and to the strategies through which communities manage them. In Indigenous settings, if risk is to be properly embedded, then, an “overriding” first fact is *dislocation* from history, cultural continuity, lands, and livelihoods (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2009).

Accordingly, we may expect that the coordinates of significant elements of resilience reside at the collective, or community level, and that the tools (material and symbolic) that make for protective factors are distinctively colored. At the cultural level, its collective nature is clear: revitalized narratives of selfhood and healing, political activism, reclaimed and revalorized cultural practices adapted for fresh applications to changing times. Our challenge is to detect such work, and the local variations in and departures from such themes, in the stories of young people.

Qualitative inquiry permits us to access local understandings of these types of transaction. Given the logistical challenges and small populations inherent to Arctic research, the flux of social transition (Ungar, Clark, Kwong, Makhnach, & Cameron, 2005), the critical importance of capturing local understandings, and our experiences with the frequent incongruity between elements of Western research paradigms and Indigenous forms of knowledge generation, this methodological approach seemed best suited.

Prior research by members of our group (e.g., Kral & Idlout, 2008; Mohatt & Rasmus, 2005; Wexler & Burke, 2011; Wexler, in press) suggests these culturally based narratives are themselves sources of resilience in circumpolar communities. Narratives reinforce cultural continuity by linking generations in the shared identity of storytelling. Because they play a central role in circumpolar Indigenous cultures, stories can provide a way of talking about stressors and change; indeed, the process of retelling can inform – and challenge, extend, modify and refine – local Indigenous community members understandings of resilience (MacDonald, Glode, & Wien, 2005). Storytelling connects people to lived experience, spiritual traditions, and collective history, and positions them as co-participants in an active process of sharing knowledge about “how we live.”

Local narratives also describe moral ideas, identity tools, and collective experience that resilience draws upon, and express modes of problem solving, social position, solidarity, and emotion regulation. They can recast representations imposed from the dominant society into metaphors for social change, challenging the prevailing social determinants of ill health (Hall & Lamont, 2009). Though resilience research increasingly emphasizes the importance of context and process, contemporary understandings of resilience can still often reflect Western assumptions such as individualistic values (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003; Ungar, Lee, Callaghan, & Boothroyd, 2005). In contrast, circumpolar Indigenous viewpoints emphasize a more collective or relational self (Briggs, 1998; Stairs, 1992), setting the stage for the development of social competence in a young person that,

among other things, values listening over assertive communication (Kendal, 1989). Similarly, historical and social context is often largely ignored in resilience research; ignorant of history, it can be clueless to this irony. Although an unambiguous “good” in most development studies, education can also symbolize colonialism in Indigenous communities (Dehyle, 1992; Dumont, 1972; McLean, 1997; Ryan, 1989). Thus, whatever the costs with respect to employment prospects, leaving school can demonstrate affiliation with cultural identity and be an expression of personal strength. Blind to its historical freight, many resilience studies consider high school graduation unquestioningly as an unproblematic outcome (Ungar, 2004; Wexler, DiFulvio & Burke, 2009). All these considerations emphasize need for understanding resilience as situated within categories of interconnection and relatedness that are core to circumpolar Indigenous cultures, based in the experience and meaning systems shaping understanding⁴.

Youth Narratives as a Lens to Understanding

Young people’s stories offer a distinctive lens on unsettled ways of life. Their narratives allow us to put their self-understandings, which themselves are often provisional works-in-progress, to work as guides to established rules for behavior and social interaction (Erikson, 1959/1980), to the sometimes troubled passage to adulthood, and to community-level responses/resources young people can draw upon in making this passage. Storytelling traditionally represents an important meaning-making activity for Indigenous people (Adam & Fosdick, 1983; Chance, 1990; Stairs, 1992; Ann Fienup-Riordan, 1997; Kendal, 1989), thereby offering the listener understandings into the distinctive logics, values, and consequences guiding conduct (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Bruner, 1990; Feldman, 1990; Rosaldo, 1986; Turner & Bruner, 1986). Because these meanings are often local, and because they provide symbolic parameters for appropriate situational behavior, they are particularly relevant to study of circumpolar Indigenous resilience. Meaning, therefore, is contingent upon both sense of self, and the action possibilities available. These possibilities in turn are shaped by community structures along with the prevailing cultural scripts associated with characteristics such as gender, age, and ethnicity. To negotiate these tensions, particularly during times of transition, youth improvise upon received meanings, engaging in creative endeavor (Adelson, 2000; Baumeister, 1987). This leads to new synthesis in meaning systems and discourse (Bacigalupo, 2003; Swan & Linehan, 2000). All this occurs at multiple levels. By levels, we refer here to each individual, to their peers, family, extended kinship structures, community, and larger society, and to global youth culture (Murray, 2000). Together, these influences put youth at the nexus of at times competing expectations aligned with social change, global influence, dominant society and Indigenous communities⁵.

⁴Numerous authors have written extensively on the linkages of resilience to local categories of experience and meaning in the Arctic (Anderson, 2000; Bodenhorn, 1988; Bodenhorn, 2000; Briggs, 1998; Condon, 1988; DeMallie, 1998; Kerrtula, 2000; Miller, 2002; Nuttall, 1992; Vitebsky, 2006; Wachovich, 1999).

⁵Several reviews provide extensive discussion of youth in the context of social change, and the need to construct coherent self-narrative during the transition to adulthood in the face of such change (McAdams, 1996; Singer, 2004; Singer & Baer, 1995; Abu-Lughod, 1986; Cruikshank, 1990; Cruikshank, 2000; Finnegan, 1992; Rosaldo, 1980a, 1980b, 1986; Shieffelin, 1990, 2002; Tonkin, 1992; Vansina, 1965).

The CIPA project draws upon current trends in mainstream resilience research, along with resilience frameworks described in Indigenous settings and multicultural studies of well-being (Allen, Rivkin, & Lopez, in press; Bandura, 1997; Diener & Suh, 2000; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). We seek to identify common and distinctive elements across five circumpolar Indigenous cultures that share a core set of challenges and social determinants, as well as historical, genealogical, and linguistic linkages. Each collaborating communities has a majority Indigenous population. All are located in the circumpolar environment within Arctic climatic zones, and all share a colonial history characterized by rapid imposed social transition and forced acculturation. Colonization was conducted by diverse institutions across sites, but resulted in a common legacy of cultural disruption that includes but is not limited to forced schooling, political domination, and suppression of Indigenous language (Berry, 1985; Bjerregaard, 2001; Chance, 1990; Kirmayer, Fletcher, et al., 1998; Larsen 1992; O'Neil, 1986; Stairs, 1992). Each community nonetheless retains hard-won distinctions of identity, culture, and livelihood. Through comparative life history narrative analysis across sites, this project seeks to describe ways in which diverse circumpolar social structures influence Indigenous young people's stressors, coping strategies, and future prospects, along with the community resilience processes that sustain these youth.

Methods

This project grew out of long-standing collaborative research relationships in each of the respective communities between community members and university-based researchers; at two of the community settings, the university researchers were also Indigenous community members. To ensure local shaping of research questions regarding resilience and successful pathways to adulthood, CIPA engaged community members in the design of the inquiry, data-gathering, and interpretation of results. CIPA's aims, together with selective gleanings from the existing literature on circumpolar Indigenous resilience and our own group's previous work in this area, were integrated into a heuristic model that guided inquiry.

In this heuristic model, pictured in Figure 1, contextual social ecological factors specific to the circumstances of youth in Indigenous circumpolar communities are identified. These include Indigenous traditional culture practices and worldviews, global youth cultural influences, national political, social, and economic systems, and the specter of rapid, imposed social change. These contextual influences are mediated by relational factors at the family, community and institutional levels; institutional level distinguishes externally imposed relational structures, such as structures within the context of Western schools, from community level relational structures that instead form around settings of local origins, such as structures that support and nurture traditional dance. These contextual and mediating factors transact with a variety of life stressors that contemporary Indigenous youth face. Prominent among these stressors are the tensions between different contextual and relational factors, and in particular, between local and outside expectations. Out of this mix, circumpolar Indigenous youth improvise passage to a future provisional vision of adulthood. In the course of this passage, they must derive, revise, and enact their own subjectivities, including meaning structures, as works in progress. This heuristic model guided our construction of a shared cross-site life history interview protocol.

Life history interviews allowed our group to construct individualized accounts of the ordinary work of local youth at each of the different sites navigating these straits in often-extraordinary ways. These accounts include both techniques of individual coping and, of even greater interest to our group, the strategic assemblages of social, symbolic, and material resources youth people use to negotiate their ways forward. Such assemblages include the kinship and community supports constituting community and cultural resilience, which provides rich, textured descriptions of enactment of local Indigenous resilience.

A hallmark of our approach was a core shared framework, that also allowed considerable local flexibility to meet local needs. CIPA had a shared sampling framework as a goal, and a common design. The project developed a core interview that also allowed each site to add elements of local interest. Finally, the analytic methods for the life history data elements in CIPA that is the focus of this special issue can be understood as a toolbox of methods sites variously drew from with different degrees of emphasis and focus, in response to the interests of the communities and the disciplinary backgrounds of local investigators. This methods section describes the planned sampling framework, design, elements of the interview procedures shared across the sites, and organizing structures of the CIPA collaborative methods.

Sample

The cross-site interview sampling strategy sought to interview 20 young people ages 11–19 at each of the five sites, balanced by gender, and two age categories (11–14 and 15–19), using nomination and snowball purposive sampling procedures (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 1990). This sample size represented approximately 10–25% of youth at these ages in each community.

Design

A cross-sectional design was selected as the most efficient way to generate rich data about the transition to adulthood in a limited time-period with capacity for cross-site comparison. The study uses a life history methodology (Cole & Knowles, 2001; White, 2006) to elicit resilience narratives from youth in order to identify stressors and resilience strategies at multiple levels including individual, family, community, and regional.

Interviewing Procedures

As will be described in each site-specific paper, interviews were conducted either by the investigator or various configurations of investigator lead interview teams. Interviewing procedures included the core cross-site protocol, with freedom to add additional elements that varied across sites, in response to community, interests, preferences, and local resources. This allowed each community to add unique site-specific interview questions of local interest. All five sites used a core semi-structured interview guide and training protocol that began with a shared opening activity for the interview, which asked each youth to map how they spent their time in the previous day. This included where they slept, whom they were with, what they did, and the time spent on each activity. As another core element, interviewers collaboratively developed a visual life timeline with each youth. The major shared element was the life history interview. This was conducted across two or more

sessions, and examined each life in social-historical context.⁶ The interview invited young people to describe their life story from their earliest memories to present. Follow up questions served to elaborate the life story by exploring major life challenges, along with how the youth overcame these challenges. Interviews were open-ended, and interviewers drew upon probe questions from the semi-structured interview guide to explore past and present resilience strategies, including resources, relationships, and coping mechanisms utilized. Probes also explored the family and community histories that make up significant components of life histories with Indigenous people (White, 2000). The semi-structured interview also asked specific questions related to personal, relational, and community well-being, and personal and community cultural continuity. Special emphasis was also given to youth responses to life stressors, including coping mechanisms such as thoughts and cognitive strategies, actions and other behavior, relationships accessed, and community structures and resources used. Finally, youth were asked a series of social network questions and completed a concluding demographic questionnaire. Figure 2 summarizes shared cross-site elements.

Community and Cross-Site Collaborative Procedures

Using previously established relationships with the community, each investigator group first worked with community leaders to establish a local steering committee (LSC) for the CIPA study at each site. The LSC was planned as multigenerational, comprised of Elders, adults, and youth, and was charged with providing local input, guidance, and joint leadership regarding specific elements of the research question. Each LSC developed local research questions of interest to the community and, in some cases, adapted data collection methods in order to maximize local relevance and acceptability. Each LSC assisted with analysis, interpretation, and dissemination. In this way, site-specific components were added to the common research question, design, and interview protocol. Site specific papers will elaborate on unique elements in the evolution of their own LSC.

In addition to the LSC in each community, a circumpolar planning committee (CSC) was formed with two youth and one adult representative from each community. The process and outcomes of this CSC meeting is described in greater detail in Ulturgasheva et al. (2011). Simultaneous translation accommodated several languages; written minutes summarizing the prior day's discussions and decisions were circulated each morning, and an iterative process of review and discussion was used. This CSC work merged local concerns with common interests into a coherent shared vision. The meeting established consensus on cross-site research questions and agreement to use a common core interview protocol, assuring comparability across sites. The deliberations of this international CSC also informed our understanding of diverse social, economic and political systems impacting young people in their pathways to adulthood. Following the CSC meeting, local interviews were finalized with the LSC in each site.

⁶The format of these interviews was guided by several previous examples in the literature (Allen et al., 2006; Caughey, 2006; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Hensel, Haakenson, & Mohatt, 2004; Miller, 2000; Mohatt, Hazel, et al., 2004; Mohatt, Rasmus, Thomas, Allen, Hazel, Hensel, et al., 2004).

Analytic Approach

We locate our interpretive project within disciplinary and methodological pluralism. Disciplinary backgrounds of the university researchers include anthropology, education, psychology, and social work. Added to this diversity was an analytic methodology that allowed each site to select three distinct sets of analytic tools, each used with somewhat different emphases across sites, in response to local community interests, and the interests and disciplinary backgrounds of the site's university researchers. This interpretive strategy was devised at a cross-site analytic planning meeting of the university researchers in July 2010, and included:

- *Review of the Resilience Literature*: This emphasized understandings of resilience as reconfigured in recent work directed at multilevel understandings, with particular attention to Indigenous approaches to resilience;
- *Grounded Theory Analysis*: Intensive qualitative analysis of interview transcripts using a modified grounded theory approach to identify both common and site specific themes that pertain to resilience patterns and practices; and
- *Narrative Analysis*: Identification of general motifs that took shape in reconstructed "resilience stories:" composite, prototypic narratives drawn from the body of interviews, and elaborated upon through subsequent research team discussions.

Our overall analytic approach represents a structured attempt to bring into productive dialogue the yield of three distinctive methods: careful re-examination of current thinking about resilience, richly textured, context-dependent, and sometimes site-specific yield of grounded theory analysis. and thematic assays from resilience stories.

Re-Reading Resilience

In the year following the analytic planning meeting, we revisited our original review of the resilience literature, informed both by the cross-cutting themes identified in our collaborative coding work and by heightened sensitivity to the elective affinities between ecological and community perspectives on resilience, and how it played out in circumpolar Indigenous settings. We re-read the literature, in effect, to refine the interpretive tools and analytic constructs we would bring to bear on interview and ethnographic data.

Grounding Theory in the Life Histories

Prior to the cross-site analytic meeting, the university researchers at each site coded local interviews using a modified grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) approach. Following key elements of procedures described by Charmaz (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2006, 2008), the local university researcher or research team reviewed interview transcripts, engaged in memoing and open coding, and then developed a local codebook. These five initial local codebooks represented provisional coding schemes, which were reviewed in weekly to biweekly international videoconference meetings over the year preceding the analytic meeting. At the cross-site analytic meeting, several days were devoted to a team understanding of each local coding system, and to development of groupings of aligned coding categories across the codebooks, melding them into a common cross-site coding protocol. For example, thirteen separate local coding categories that included codes such as

“not to give up,” “staying healthy,” and “avoiding conflict” were grouped under the cross-site code “getting through things.” Each local code was assigned to one of ten cross-site codes, creating groupings of code families using the Atlas.ti (Friese, 2012) software approach to code structure as an organizing algorithm. We sought to develop a cross-site codebook and a coding protocol that preserved local meanings with sufficiently flexibility for use in site-specific analyses, yet capable of bridging common elements to allow for comparative work. During the year following the analytic meeting, the university researchers at each site used Atlas.ti software to implement this coding system to recode local interviews. While doing this work, teams further refined their local site-specific codebooks, and began to identify candidate emergent coding categories.

Closely Read Resilience Narratives

At the analytical meeting, we had also begun to identify provisional motifs discernible in “resilience stories.” Emergent entities in their own right, these offered glimpses into the background or subtext behind the extended episodes of trial and trouble—and routes, resources, backup supports and inventiveness relied upon to negotiate them—recounted in the life histories.

These narratives invited us to identify grounding assumptions of Indigenous culture and features of local “social imaginaries” (Taylor, 2004) at a different level than that afforded by grounded theory. To complement the close, textually driven microanalysis of grounded theory, investigators assemble these motifs and fragments into a brief narratives. Team members composed these composite narratives from interview fragments, collateral commentary, and ethnographic material collected over time. Here, in sharp contrast to the deconstructive, segmented, and “fracturing” approach of grounded theory to develop a stable set of abstract theoretical concepts, narrative interpretation relies on prior theory, the preservation of sequence and detail, and careful attention to time and place to develop a case centered approach (Riessman, 2008). In narrative analysis (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2012; Hurwitz, Greenhalgh, & Skultans, 2004), plot and character rather than excerpt and code are guiding concerns. Sequence and storyline enable capture of agency, intention, and meaning in ways that the crosscutting and amalgamating work of grounded theory does not. In this case, the intent was to seed our collective thinking with the lively assembly of tropes, staging devices, plotlines, characters, and stratagems that could be extracted from these reconstructed narratives of adolescent life. We were particularly interested in the local capacity for accommodating departures from what might be considered the prescribed or standard version of making the passage to adulthood—variations in pathways and styles that are either recognized and valued as alternatives in their own right, or provided for in ways that amount to compensatory assistance.

An Iterative Analytic Process

We variously engaged the perspectives of Elders, grandparents, parents, extended kin, other community members, and youth through their roles on LSCs. Based in previous work of the researchers, we involved LSC members in the analysis through “briefings” about the preliminary analyses, again locally selecting among various strategies with varying emphases at each of the sites. For example, one modal strategy variously applied by teams

entailed presentations to LSCs of preliminary analyses based on *memoing* (Mohatt, Rasmus, Thomas, Allen, Hazel, & Hensel, 2004). This allowed researchers to identify initial factors and conceptual orders related to the stressors, and the relationships and resources used by participants to respond to them. In this approach, basics of the codes and initial findings were shared orally with the LSC for feedback. The researchers had already done this kind of iterative analysis in previous studies (Allen et al., 2006; Kral et al., 2011; Kral, 2003; Kral & Idlout, 2006; Mohatt et al., 2004; Mohatt et al., 2008; Wexler, 2006; 2009; 2011). These preliminary conceptual groupings were shared with and modified when necessary by local LSC members. This *cultural auditing* process (Mohatt, Thomas, & Team, 2006) ensures cultural validity of the findings. This provided insight into the kinds of tensions, resources, and strategies meaningful to local people. Investigators used field notes from these meetings to provide contextual information, and to highlight possible areas to address in the analysis of the interviews. Using these methods allowed CIPA to describe the stressors faced by Indigenous youth across gender and two age cohorts, the resources shaping their culturally patterned resilience strategies, and how these stressors and culturally patterned resilience strategies played out across sites.

Describing Gender and Developmental Factors

Each research team, with guidance from their LSC, considered each youth life history individually, *within* age cohorts, *within* gender, and finally *across* age cohorts and gender. Individual transcripts were coded to highlight areas salient to the main research foci—dominant stressors experienced, social and material resources accessed, and characteristics of strategies used to respond, grouped by age and gender. The analysis yielded dominant stressors and resilience strategies, by gender, at two distinct developmental stages.

Assuring Quality and Credibility through Collaborative Research

Each researcher has been working with participating communities for at least a decade. We believe this long-term participation of the communities, along with the involvement of the LSCs, the CSC, and the auditing process described above as a form of respondent validation, allows for more accurate identification and interpretation of the qualitative data. This increases the likelihood of deeper understanding of resilience from local perspectives, highlighting elements of Indigenous frameworks heretofore missed by resilience researchers.

Mapping the Resilience Pathways of Indigenous Youth in Five Circumpolar Communities

In this special issue, each community is represented in a paper that highlights locally salient themes. These five site-specific articles describe how youth participants are growing up, spending time, transgressing or adhering to expectations, building and sustaining relationships, and imagining their futures. The themes emerging in each paper will also sensitize the reader to findings that resonate across the sites. These cross-site themes are of variable salience in each individual site, yet the emerging concepts nonetheless seem to capture something vital and recurring in the resilience work documented in the life histories. In the concluding article, we close by considering stressors and culturally patterned

resilience strategies across sites, searching for continuities and discontinuities, and the influence of cross-national social policies.

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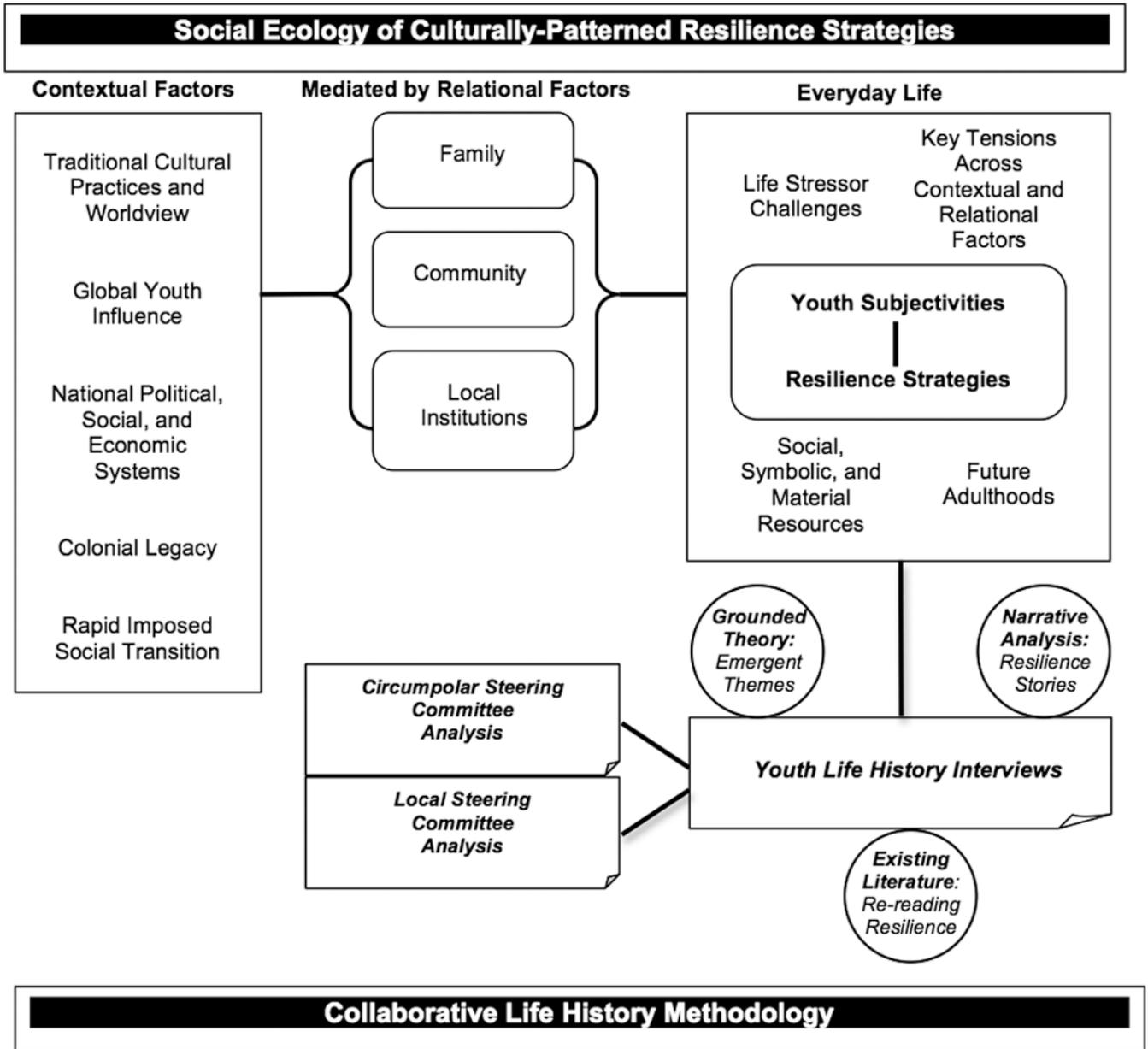


Figure 1. Heuristic model guiding Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood study methodology

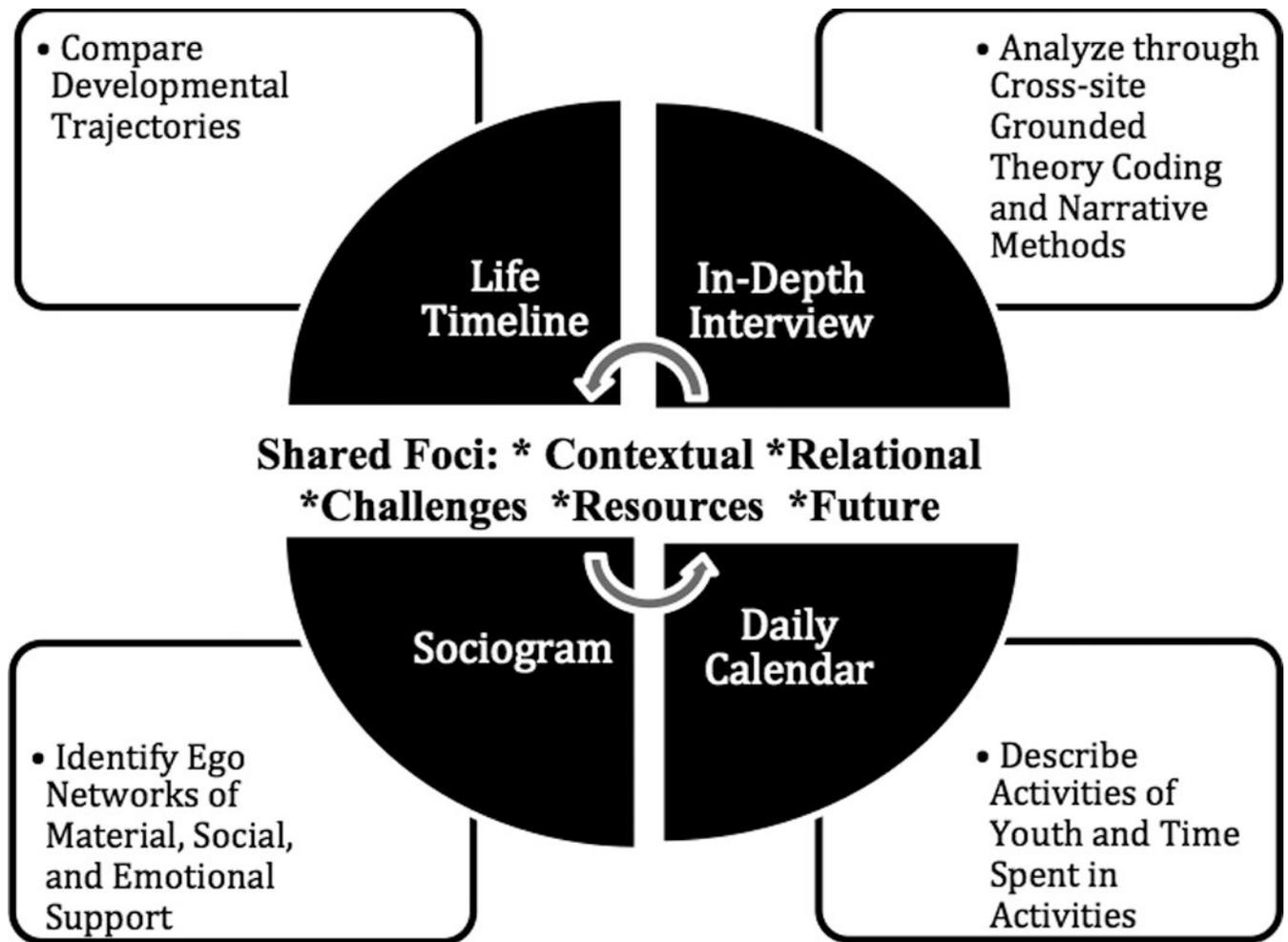


Figure 2.
Cross-site life history interview