

In Review

Rethinking Resilience From Indigenous Perspectives

Laurence J Kirmayer, MD¹; Stéphane Dandeneau, PhD²; Elizabeth Marshall, BA³;
Morgan Kahentonni Phillips, MA⁴; Karla Jessen Williamson, PhD⁵

The notions of resilience that have emerged in developmental psychology and psychiatry in recent years require systematic rethinking to address the distinctive cultures, geographic and social settings, and histories of adversity of indigenous peoples. In Canada, the overriding social realities of indigenous peoples include their historical rootedness to a specific place (with traditional lands, communities, and transactions with the environment) and the profound displacements caused by colonization and subsequent loss of autonomy, political oppression, and bureaucratic control. We report observations from an ongoing collaborative project on resilience in Inuit, Métis, Mi'kmaq, and Mohawk communities that suggests the value of incorporating indigenous constructs in resilience research. These constructs are expressed through specific stories and metaphors grounded in local culture and language; however, they can be framed more generally in terms of processes that include: regulating emotion and supporting adaptation through relational, ecocentric, and cosmocentric concepts of self and personhood; revisioning collective history in ways that valorize collective identity; revitalizing language and culture as resources for narrative self-fashioning, social positioning, and healing; and renewing individual and collective agency through political activism, empowerment, and reconciliation. Each of these sources of resilience can be understood in dynamic terms as emerging from interactions between individuals, their communities, and the larger regional, national, and global systems that locate and sustain indigenous agency and identity. This social-ecological view of resilience has important implications for mental health promotion, policy, and clinical practice.

Can J Psychiatry. 2011;56(2):84–91.

Highlights

- Aboriginal Peoples in Canada have diverse notions of resilience grounded in culturally distinctive concepts of the person that connect people to community and the environment, the importance of collective history, the richness of Aboriginal languages and traditions, as well as individual and collective agency and activism.
- Narratives of historical identity and continuity along with revitalization of culture, language, and tradition can help repair the ruptures of cultural continuity that have occurred with colonization and the active suppression of indigenous cultures and identity.
- Clinical intervention with individuals and mental health promotion with communities can mobilize culture-related resources for resilience.

Key Words: *cultural psychiatry, resilience, First Nations, Inuit, Métis, mental health promotion, community mental health, cultural concept of person, narrative, historical trauma*

A growing body of work identifies factors that contribute to healthy development and well-being in situations of adversity.^{1,2} The ability to do well despite adversity has been termed resilience and attributed to specific traits or characteristics of the individual. The introduction of the concept of resilience acknowledged that many people do well despite severe hardships, trauma, and deprivation, and attempted to shift the focus of mental health research toward the analysis of individual strengths and positive outcomes. However, in

many cases, resilience research has simply meant looking at the inverse of risk factors.^{3,4} A more thoroughgoing engagement with the concept of resilience may lead to the recognition of new dimensions of development and ecosystemic processes that contribute to human flourishing.

The models of resilience that have emerged in developmental psychology and psychiatry in recent years are based largely on work with the children of people with severe mental

health problems and, especially, with inner-city children and youth facing poverty, violence, discrimination, and other forms of social adversity.^{5,6} While pertinent to the experience of indigenous populations, these models require systematic rethinking to address processes and dimensions that may be distinctive or especially important for specific groups owing to their unique cultures, histories, social and geographical settings, and definitions of health and well-being.^{7,8} In our paper, we present some observations and reflections from a comparative study of concepts of resilience among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. The central goals of our project are to understand resilience in collective and cultural terms and to identify social-structural barriers to the expression of resilience at crucial life transitions in indigenous populations. Understanding culture and context can be essential for accurate psychiatric diagnosis and effective intervention.⁹

Models and Metaphors of Resilience

Based on experience with physical materials, the metaphor of resilience suggests the ability to return to an original state after being stressed, perturbed, or otherwise bent out of shape. The implication is that, for a resilient system, the perturbation leaves no lasting change. This interpretation of resilience is too static and ahistorical to capture the nature of human adaptation and development across the lifespan. In biological systems, resilience usually does not involve simply springing back to a previous state but is a dynamic process of adjustment, adaptation, and transformation in response to challenges and demands. In adapting, the organism also usually changes its own environment.

In psychology, resilience is commonly framed as an individual trait or process rather than emphasizing its systemic or ecological roots. Resilience has been associated with individual psychological characteristics including hardiness, flexibility, problem-solving ability, intelligence, sense of humour, and social skills.¹⁰ Although resilience tends to be framed as an individual characteristic, it may also have systemic, collective, or communal dimensions.¹¹ At the level of family and community, resilience may reside in the durability of interpersonal relationships in the extended family and wider social networks of support.^{12,13} What is needed then are alternative frameworks that take into account the dynamic processes on many levels that may confer on the individual, communities, and whole peoples better prospects for survival and positive development. Indigenous concepts provide ways to approach a dynamic, systemic, ecological view of resilience.

Much recent work has focused on the importance of social determinants of health.¹⁴ Most of these social determinants are relevant to indigenous peoples, who suffer from poor health, compared with the general population in Canada and other countries.¹⁵⁻¹⁸ But there are also social determinants of health specific to indigenous populations, including: the impact of the history of colonization with subsequent efforts at extermination, marginalization, or exclusion, and, eventually, state dependency; the effects of residential schools and other

regimes of cultural suppression and forced assimilation; experiences of racism and discrimination and the negative portrayal of Aboriginal people in the dominant society; and the importance of relationship to the land or place for individual and communal identity.¹⁹⁻²⁴ These are not discrete or independent factors but interact in ways that reflect historical processes of colonization, marginalization, and oppression that have resulted in particular patterns of persistent inequality.

Specific social determinants of health point to particular sources or processes of resilience. In the case of indigenous peoples, some of these strategies of resilience draw from traditional knowledge, values, and practices, but they also reflect ongoing responses to the new challenges posed by evolving relationships with the dominant society and emerging global networks of indigenous peoples pursuing common cause.²⁵⁻²⁷

The Roots of Resilience Project

Roots of Resilience is a CIHR-funded interdisciplinary research collaboration that is exploring the factors that promote resilience in mental health among indigenous peoples across the lifespan. We approach resilience as a dynamic process of social and psychological adaptation and transformation. As such, resilience can be a characteristic of individuals, families, communities, or larger social groups and is manifested as positive outcomes in the face of historical and current stresses.

Different historical, social, psychological, and physical contexts make for different individual and communal experiences of these stresses. This variation provides a valuable opportunity to identify the social roots of resilience. In particular, we are interested in how factors at personal, family, and community levels interact with larger social structural constraints to enable some individuals and communities to do well where others may languish.

In our project, we work with focus groups and key informants to explore local understandings of adversity, definitions of good outcome or doing well, and the specific individual and contextual factors that participants believe may contribute to doing well despite adversity. Research in each community is conducted in partnership with a community steering committee and a community-based indigenous researcher.²⁸ A manual for adapting the research protocol to community needs and conducting the semi-structured interviews is available online at the project website.²⁹

A major focus of our research is on the contribution to resilience of stories of identity and transformation at personal and collective levels. The idea that resilience might reside in the ways we have of narrating our lives follows from a substantial literature on the narrative basis of the self.³⁰⁻³⁴ Autobiographical narratives typically make reference to core cultural values as well as to particular construals of personal and historical time.³⁵⁻³⁸ People may make sense of their own predicaments and map possibilities for adaptation and a positive vision of their identity and future prospects by drawing on collective

history, myths, and sacred teachings. At the same time, these collective forms of narrative serve not only to help people make sense of their experience and construct a valued identity but also ensure the continuity and vitality of a community or a people.^{39,40} Narrative speaks directly to the ruptures of cultural continuity that occurred with the systematic suppression and dismantling of indigenous ways of life that resulted in a profound sense of dislocation and despair.⁴¹ Narrative resilience therefore has a communal or collective dimension, maintained by the circulation of stories invested with cultural power and authority, which the individual and groups can use to articulate and assert their identity, affirm core values and attitudes needed to face challenges, and generate creative solutions to new predicaments. A research methodology that focuses on narrative is particularly welcome in indigenous communities, where storytelling has played a central role in the transmission of culture and is widely respected as a source of knowledge, wisdom, and affirmation of identity.^{40,42–45}

A focus on narratives also helps capture some of the individual variation in strategies of resilience. Forms of resilience may vary by a person's age, sex, education, and life history, and change over time with transformations of identity and community. There may be culturally distinctive strategies of resilience that reflect the specific histories, environments, and lifeways of indigenous peoples. Our work in Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Métis, and Inuit communities indicates commonalities across different cultural groups as well as distinctive ideas about resilience relevant to mental health promotion and intervention.

Mi'kmaq Resilience: The Spirit of the Treaties

The Mi'kmaq are indigenous people of Atlantic Canada and currently number about 40 000. British colonization of Eastern Canada resulted in a process of progression marginalization, usurpation of lands, and decimation of the population.⁴⁶ Despite the devastating impact of colonization, residential schools, and forced assimilation, the Mi'kmaq in many communities have continued to speak their language and to practice traditional customs in daily life. The Mi'kmaq language is a rich repository of knowledge about local ecosystems but also of indigenous concepts of conflict resolution. Through collaboration and cooperation based on traditional values, the Mi'kmaq have been able to respond to the challenges of colonization and maintain their cohesiveness as a people for centuries.

From a contemporary Mi'kmaq perspective, a source of Mi'kmaq resilience lies in the treaties with the British Crown, negotiated from the late 17th century until the signing of the Watertown Treaty of 1776.⁴⁷ Although intended by the colonizers as vehicles for containment and displacement of the indigenous population, the Mi'kmaq understood these treaties as agreements to share their knowledge with the Europeans. As expressed in the language of these treaties, Mi'kmaq believed that a true human being was one who could live in peace and friendship. According to oral tradition, at the signing of the 1752 Treaty, the first words the Mi'kmaq chief said to the representative of the Crown were: "I never truly believed you to be human."⁴⁷ In signing the treaty, Mi'kmaq

formally recognized the European colonizers as human and brought them under the protection of the Treaty, to show the newcomers the path of peaceful coexistence to live in the spirit of community. In this sense, the treaty was meant to affirm a system of beliefs and values that went far beyond any material benefits it established.

This broader spiritual meaning of the treaties is central to contemporary self-understandings of Mi'kmaq, not as a people dispossessed of their lands but as equal partners in political arrangements with Canada. At an individual level, this is strikingly illustrated by the actions of a group of Mi'kmaq construction workers who, in the wake of the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Center, decided to go to Manhattan to assist in the rescue efforts expressly because they wished to honour the treaties.⁴⁷

The spirit of peace, friendship, and reciprocity that Mi'kmaq found in the language of the treaties is also expressed in traditional Mi'kmaq notions of conflict resolution and forgiveness associated with one of the most powerful and sacred words in the Mi'kmaq language, *apisiktuaqn*.⁴⁸ The closest English translation of *apisiktuaqn* is forgiveness or reconciliation. *Apisiktuaqn* is a verb that refers to a sacred process reserved for times when peace and friendship are disrupted.

When there was a dispute within a family, community, or nation, the parties involved in the dispute were assembled in a circle around a fire by the Kinup—the ritual leader deemed the most holy among them. Everyone in the community who might have been affected by the offence, whether directly or indirectly, participated in the gathering. The gathering began with prayer to invoke the spirit of Wise Council to restore the spirit of community. The offended person sat on one side of the circle with their family, while the offender and their family sat on the opposite side. The ritual involved 4 phases, beginning with a process of recognition or acknowledgement. The Kinup led a discussion to reveal the sequence of events and to help everyone to agree on all of the circumstances that led to the offence. The next phase was restitution, which involved a discussion regarding what action was most appropriate to compensate for the offence. The offender was expected to carry out the restitution.

A process of reconciliation would then occur. This was symbolized by the offender crossing the circle to stand in front of the offended where he would drop to one knee to kiss the cheek of the offended. The offender then would stand up and say, "I'm sorry for having offended you; would you please forgive me [*apisiktuwi*]?" Once having returned to their spot in the circle the offended person would repeat the same process of reconciliation, requesting *apisiktuaqn* from the offender before returning to their side of the circle.

The Kinup would then rise to recount the entire process for everyone to hear, beginning with the circumstances surrounding the offence. The process of reconciliation was described and

the Kinup asked the crowd assembled if they had anything else to question or to add. Once that final round was concluded, the Kinup would describe how everything had been restored to harmony and the incident or offence was not to be discussed again in the future. The Kinup then led prayers to complete the restoration of harmony before everyone left the circle.

This traditional process for re-establishing harmony is now rarely seen as a formal event. Today, *apisiktuaqn* is usually practiced only between individuals. In the *Mi'kmaq* communities of Eskasoni and Unama'ki on Cape Breton Island, *apisiktuaqn* is still sometimes practiced to resolve conflicts for a person who is dying. However, the spirit of reconciliation explicit in this formal process of forgiveness and reconciliation is an important source of resilience among contemporary *Mi'kmaq* and has informed efforts to develop alternative forms of sentencing and restorative justice.⁴⁹ It is part of a moral consciousness, stemming from the treaties, that imbues life with meaning and dignity.

Mohawk Resilience: Resistance and Revitalization

Our team also has worked with partners in Kahnawake, 1 of 8 Mohawk communities located throughout Quebec, Ontario, and New York state that make up the *Kanien'kehá:ka* (Mohawk—People of the Flint) nation. The Mohawk are 1 of the 6 nations of the Iroquois Confederacy or Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse). Originally more than 50 000 acres, Kahnawake's land base has been gradually depleted through land cessions, including those associated with the construction of the St Lawrence Seaway, the Mercier Bridge, a rail bridge, railways, highways, and Hydro Quebec power lines.⁵⁰ Today, Kahnawake exists on a land base of 12 000 acres with a population of 7389 on-reserve (about 1200 households), and 2066 off-reserve.

In addition to collective trauma and losses associated with the eradication of the riverfront with the creation of the St Lawrence Seaway, the shrinking of Kahnawake's land base, and the challenges posed by changing definitions of community membership, the Oka crisis in 1990 can be identified as a turning point for the *Kanien'kehá:ka* in the reawakening of nationalism, and pride in the language and culture. The mobilization of the community to oppose the appropriation of sacred land led to a renewed sense of political agency and engagement.⁵¹ It also increased awareness of historic injustices in the larger society, giving impetus to a sequence of responses including the establishment of Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the official apology of the government for the residential school system, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Indian Act and subsequent government policies suppressed traditional government by prohibiting the use of the *Kanien'kéha* language and cultural practices and placing political authority in the hands of the Minister and the Department of Indian Affairs. The community has responded to these challenges by working to revitalize language and

culture, and reassert control over health services, education, economic development, and community services, while strengthening links to sister communities throughout the Iroquois Confederacy.

Pre-contact, the Haudenosaunee were bound together through a powerful democratic covenant, the Great Law of Peace (*Kaianere'kowa*) with a world view based on a cosmological belief system connecting humans with nature in the supernatural realm. The orally transmitted Creation Story taught how humans came to live on Mother Earth. The Creator gave direct instructions for beautifying the earth and making it more pleasing for human habitation, and enjoined humans to see to it that Mother Earth is taken care of for the next 7 generations (a generation that will never be seen by the present generation).⁵² Thus the Creation Story conveys core cultural values and outlines a moral system. The extended time perspective symbolized by 7 generations suggests the forward-thinking outlook common among the Iroquois.⁵³ Culture and language provide resources for resilience, not only for the individual but also for the whole community, the Mohawk Nation, and the Haudenosaunee. For the Mohawks of Kahnawake, responding to challenges has resulted in tenacity, dignity, resourcefulness, and hope, and currently directs community efforts to strengthening links with a proud heritage and rebuilding communal institutions based on the values and principles contained within the Creation Story and the *Kaianera'kó:wa* (The Great Law of Peace).

Métis Resilience: Self-Reliance and Débrouillardise

The Métis are indigenous people who trace their ancestry to First Nations and European (mainly French) colonial ancestors.⁵⁴ Over 300 000 people self-identify as Métis, most living in urban settings or peri-urban communities across Canada.⁵⁵ Unlike their First Nations cousins who, after the imposition of the Indian Act, were placed in geographically defined communities or reserves, the communities that make up the Métis Nation are spread over a wide range of geographical areas. This made for a distinct resilience process promoting self-reliance and autonomy.

Historically, Métis have faced discrimination because of both their indigenous origins and their mixed heritage, which presents a threat to other groups' definitions of boundaries. The identity of the Métis people was forged from 2 or more ancestries, a process termed *métissage*.^{54,56–58} The resultant identity is not a patchwork but an integrated whole that is distinct from its constituent parts. Because the sources of Métis identity vary across the country, the Métis are themselves a culturally diverse nation.

Although different Métis groups derive their culture and traditions from different ancestries, one cultural value that links Métis across diverse communities is the emphasis on self-reliance, autonomy, and independence.⁵⁹ Métis pride themselves on being independent from their European cousins, their First Nations brothers and sisters, and even from other Métis groups, communities, colonies, or settlements.

Although ties and relationships with other groups are of great importance, the Métis value doing things their own way, which is a way of expressing their distinct identity. This emphasis on independence has fostered self-reliance and a strong work ethic, enabling the Métis to adapt to many of the challenges they have faced. With this self-reliance, the Métis have also been able to build strengths in many different arenas, establishing a network of resources from which other Métis individuals and communities can draw.

Related to the Métis notion of resilience through independence is the concept of *débrouillardise*. Discussing research on resilience, one of the senior members of a francophone local of the Manitoba Métis Federation commented, “C’est d’la *débrouillardise* ça, la *résilience*, c’est d’être *débrouillard*” [That’s resourcefulness, resilience; it’s being resourceful]. Although *débrouillard* can be translated as resourceful, the English word lacks the colloquial tone and symbolism it has in French or Michif (a language derived from French and Cree spoken by some Métis in the Midwest). Being *débrouillard* refers to a combination of being good at finding solutions, creative, having a lot of street smarts (or country smarts), being a jack of all trades, and being able to make a life for oneself and one’s family.⁶⁰ Most importantly, it also refers to perseverance and willingness to carry on in the face of challenges or setbacks. In other discussions, people often refer to a resilient person as un *capable* [French; a capable person], referring to the person’s ability to harness their resourcefulness for the betterment of their family and community. To be *débrouillard* and un *capable* means that one can draw from all of the physical, ecological, and psychological resources available to get the job done. Although, in this example, we use the Michif word *débrouillard* to refer to the concept, other Métis likely use other words or metaphors to refer to the same essential concept.⁶¹

Débrouillardise refers to a psychological, physical, and spiritual way of being that has contributed greatly to the Métis’ survival and resilience. As mentioned earlier, it is related to the concept of independence in that one must be *débrouillard* if one chooses to be independent and do things one’s own way. In combination, both concepts have allowed Métis to make a virtue of their hybridity and enabled individuals to maintain their unique identities while flourishing as a people.

Inuit Resilience: Drawing Strength From Language and the Land

Before the arrival of Europeans, Inuit occupied the Arctic shores of North America living in small bands or extended family groups. Each of the groups was self-sufficient, living without any state intervention and receiving no government assistance. Every individual owed his or her life to the family, the camp group, and community, and the good will of the animals, spirits of the land.⁶² The links to the land and the animals sustained human life and well-being, physically, socially, and spiritually.⁶³

The resilience of the Inuit has been mentioned frequently in relation to their persistence, resourcefulness, endurance, and

adaptability to the unpredictable Arctic environment—an environment recognized as one of the world’s most challenging human habitats.⁶⁴ However, during the last 150 years, Inuit have been steadily colonized by non-northerners who have laid claim to vast areas of the Inuit homelands.⁶⁵ With colonization, foreign ideas of social organization and structure were introduced and enforced.⁶⁶ Inuit—like other northerners—were expected to adapt to the new system without much consideration of the incongruity of modes of social organization or way of life.⁶⁷

The concept of resilience resonates strongly among Inuit with the concept of *niriunniq*, an Inuktitut word that can be glossed as hope. Faced with adversity, people talk of hope and wait for it to reveal itself. For many, it is an elusive experience but its potency as a life-giving force is never questioned. Being animists at heart, Inuit understand the world as shaped by powerful forces coming together—forces that really are beyond one person’s control. Expressions such as *ajurnarmat* [cannot be helped] or *isumamminik* [on its own will], reflect the Inuit recognition of human limitations. While these expressions may appear fatalistic, Inuit appreciate that health and well-being depend not only on the body but also on the physical and social environment as well as cosmological forces. The Inuit concept of person can be described as both ecocentric and cosmocentric.^{63,68} Compared with the anthropocentric concepts common to Western traditions, in Inuit thought the person is not at the centre of the universe but only one entity in a world of powerful forces. Inuit seek health through achieving the best balance or equilibrium among the forces in the world around the person.

For Inuit today, resilience is not so much about adaptation to the Arctic environment as ongoing efforts to adapt to a daunting social environment created by the incongruent and often conflicting policies and institutions introduced by southern administration. As for many other indigenous peoples, however, the need for resilience is increasingly driven by global phenomena that are dramatically changing the Arctic climate and ecosystem.⁶⁹ Inuit have responded to this challenge by initiating their own research activities and legal challenges, as well as by taking their predicament to global political organizations to raise awareness of the profound consequences of global warming to their communities and to urge a timely and effective response.⁷⁰

Conclusion

For Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, ideas of resilience are grounded in cultural values that have persisted despite historical adversity or have emerged out of the renewal of indigenous identities. These include culturally distinctive concepts of the person, the importance of collective history, the richness of Aboriginal languages and traditions, and the importance of individual and collective agency and activism.

Aboriginal notions of personhood root identity in a person’s connections to the land and environment, which may include recognition of a larger world of human and other-than-human spirits.⁷¹ Thinking about the person as fundamentally

connected to the environment dissolves the opposition between nature and culture.⁷² The human predicament then becomes one of working with powerful forces both within and outside the individual. Approached with respect, the natural environment provides not only sustenance but also sources of soothing, emotion regulation, guidance, and healing.⁷³

The renewal of identity also involves revisioning collective history in ways that valorize indigenous identity. Rather than seeing themselves portrayed as more or less noble savages in popular media, or as vulnerable people who were simply duped and dispossessed of their lands and autonomy, this critical history appreciates the scale and scope of the challenges faced by indigenous people and sees their persistence despite great odds as clear evidence of individual and collective resilience.⁷⁴ Re-examining the historical record from indigenous points of view finds strength and value in their negotiations, treaties, and acts of resistance or creative transformation. Thus Mi'ikmaq offer an interpretation of the treaties in which they express moral values of peace, friendship, and reciprocity that provide a strong position from which to respond to current challenges. John Ralston Saul⁷⁵ has argued that we should recognize the Canadian commitment to fairness and equity in society as rooted not in British or French traditions but as emerging from our collective Aboriginal heritage.

Another basic source of individual and collective resilience comes from efforts to revitalize language, culture, and spirituality as resources for self-fashioning, collective solidarity, and individual and collective healing. Each Aboriginal language provides a distinct conceptual vocabulary and grammar that constitute a unique way of looking at the world.⁷⁶ Learning about one's language, culture, and traditions strengthens a sense of identity and directly counteracts the cultural discontinuity and dispossession that resulted from the colonial enterprise and its aftermath.

Finally, many communities are strengthening individual and collective agency through political activism, empowerment, and reconciliation. Active engagement or success in political negotiations such as land claims or the search for other forms of recognition of rights and identity not only brings material benefits but also enhances collective and individual self-esteem and is associated with better mental health.⁷⁷ Collective efficacy strengthens individual efficacy and so makes individuals feel more capable of addressing their own needs.⁷⁸

Aboriginal perspectives tell us that much of what seems to promote resilience originates outside the individual. While early work on resilience was concerned with the individual, resilience can also be a feature of whole communities. Communities exist in an ecological balance with their surrounding environment. They require a moral economy regulated by ideas about coexistence. For indigenous peoples, this has been traditionally conveyed through stories that are built around culturally informed notions of personhood that link the individual to the community (both past and present) and to the land and environment.

Ethnographic research by our group and others makes it clear that culturally based narratives provide cognitive and rhetorical resources for resilience in Aboriginal communities. Narratives of historical identity and continuity speak directly to the ruptures of cultural continuity that have occurred with colonization and the active suppression of indigenous cultures and identity. Traditional stories of origin and the adventures of mythic figures encode ideas about the relationship of people to the environment as well as moral and esthetic ideas about balance, harmony, peace, and friendship. These ways of narrating identity and collective experience can contribute to resilience through emotion regulation, problem solving, social positioning, and collective solidarity. The ways that Aboriginal Peoples are portrayed in the dominant discourses of popular culture and the bureaucratic and technocratic institutions of government also impact significantly on their mental health.²⁴ Stories of Aboriginal history and resilience can circulate outside the community as well, refiguring the representations of Aboriginal Peoples in the larger society in ways that can foster resilience through recognition, respect, and reconciliation.⁷⁹ These stories also provide useful metaphors for thinking about the social and political changes that must occur to reduce health disparities and insure well-being for indigenous people and all who share this land.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Institute for Aboriginal Peoples Health, "Roots of Resilience: Transformations of Identity and Community in Indigenous Mental Health" (CIHR-77837) awarded to Dr Kirmayer, Principal Investigator. The Canadian Psychiatric Association proudly supports the In Review series by providing an honorarium to the authors.

References

1. Masten AS. Resilience in developing systems: progress and promise as the fourth wave rises. *Dev Psychopathol.* 2007;19(3):921–930.
2. Luthar SS, Sawyer JA, Brown PJ. Conceptual issues in studies of resilience: past, present, and future research. *Ann N Y Acad Sci.* 2006;1094:105–115.
3. Charney DS. Psychobiological mechanisms of resilience and vulnerability: implications for successful adaptation to extreme stress. *Am J Psychiatry.* 2004;161(2):195–216.
4. Holton TL, Brass GM, Kirmayer LJ. The discourses of resilience, 'enculturation' and identity in Aboriginal mental health research. In: Teo T, Stenner P, Rutherford A, et al, editors. *Varieties of theoretical psychology: international philosophical and practical concerns.* Concord (ON): Captus; 2009. p 194–204.
5. Rutter M. Resilience in the face of adversity: protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorder. *Br J Psychiatry.* 1985;147:598–611.
6. Garnezy N. Children in poverty: resilience despite risk. *Psychiatry.* 1993;56(1):127–136.
7. Burack J, Blidner A, Flores H, et al. Constructions and deconstructions of risk, resilience and wellbeing: a model for understanding the development of Aboriginal adolescents. *Australas Psychiatry.* 2007;15(Suppl 1):S18–S23.
8. Fleming JE, Ledogar R. Resilience, an evolving concept: a review of literature relevant to Aboriginal research. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health.* 2008;6(2):7–23.
9. Gone JP, Kirmayer LJ. On the wisdom of considering culture and context in psychopathology. In: Millon T, Krueger RF, Simonsen E, editors. *Contemporary directions in psychopathology: scientific*

- foundations of the DSM-V and ICD-11. New York (NY): The Guilford Press; 2010. p 72–96.
10. Iarocci G, Root R, Burack JA. Social competence and mental health among Aboriginal youth: an integrative developmental perspective. In: Kirmayer LJ, Valaskakis G, editors. *Healing traditions: the mental health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. Vancouver (BC): University of British Columbia Press; 2008. p 80–106.
 11. Kirmayer LJ, Sedhev M, Whitley R, et al. Community resilience: models, metaphors and measures. *J Aborig Health*. 2009;7(1):62–117.
 12. Ungar M. The importance of parents and other caregivers to the resilience of high-risk adolescents. *Fam Process*. 2004;43(1):23–41.
 13. Walsh F. *Strengthening family resilience*. 2nd ed. New York (NY): The Guilford Press; 2006.
 14. Marmot M. Achieving health equity: from root causes to fair outcomes. *Lancet*. 2007;370(9593):1153–1163.
 15. Adelson N. The embodiment of inequity: health disparities in aboriginal Canada. *Can J Public Health*. 2005;96(Suppl 2):S45–S61.
 16. Gracey M, King M. Indigenous health part 1: determinants and disease patterns. *Lancet*. 2009;374(9683):65–75.
 17. King M, Smith A, Gracey M. Indigenous health part 2: the underlying causes of the health gap. *Lancet*. 2009;374(9683):76–85.
 18. Reading J. *The crisis of chronic disease among Aboriginal Peoples: a challenge for public health, population health and social policy*. Victoria (BC): Centre for Aboriginal Health Research; 2009.
 19. Wilson K, Rosenberg MW. Exploring the determinants of health for First Nations peoples in Canada: can existing frameworks accommodate traditional activities? *Soc Sci Med*. 2002;55(11):2017–2031.
 20. Reading CL, Wien F. *Health inequalities and social determinants of Aboriginal Peoples' health*. Victoria (BC): National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health; 2009.
 21. Richmond CA. The social determinants of Inuit health: a focus on social support in the Canadian Arctic. *Int J Circumpolar Health*. 2009;68(5):471–487.
 22. Carson B, Dunbar T, Chenhall RD, et al, editors. *Social determinants of Indigenous health*. Crows Nest (AU): Allen & Unwin; 2007.
 23. Alfred GT. Colonialism and state dependency. *J Aborig Health*. 2009;5(2):42–60.
 24. de Leeuw S, Greenwood M, Cameron E. Deviant constructions: how governments preserve colonial narratives of addictions and poor mental health to intervene into the lives of indigenous children and families in Canada. *Int J Ment Health Addict*. 2009;8(2):282–295.
 25. Stout MD, Kipling G. *Aboriginal people, resilience and the residential school legacy*. Ottawa (ON): Aboriginal Healing Foundation; 2003.
 26. Whitbeck LB, Chen X, Hoyt DR, et al. Discrimination, historical loss and enculturation: culturally specific risk and resiliency factors for alcohol abuse among American Indians. *J Stud Alcohol*. 2004;65(4):409–418.
 27. Richmond CA, Ross NA, Egeland GM. Social support and thriving health: a new approach to understanding the health of indigenous Canadians. *Am J Public Health*. 2007;97(10):1827–1833.
 28. Canadian Institutes of Health Research. *Guidelines for health research involving Aboriginal people*. Ottawa (ON): Canadian Institutes of Health Research; 2007.
 29. Dow S, Dandeneau S, Phillips M, et al. *Stories of Resilience Project: manual for researchers, interviewers and focus group facilitators* [Internet]. Montreal (QC): Culture and Mental Health Research Unit, Jewish General Hospital; 2008 [date cited unknown]. Available from: <http://www.mcgill.ca/resilience/resources>.
 30. Bruner J. *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press; 1990.
 31. Bruner J. *Making stories: law, literature, life*. New York (NY): Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2002.
 32. Kirby AP. *Narrative and the self*. Bloomington (IL): Indiana University Press; 1991.
 33. McAdams DP. Self and story. In: Stewart AJ, Healy JM Jr, Ozer D, et al, editors. *Perspectives in personality*. Vol 3 (Part B). London (GB): Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 1991. p 133–159.
 34. Sarbin TR, editor. *Narrative psychology: the storied nature of human conduct*. New York (NY): Praeger; 1986.
 35. Adelson N. Re-imagining aboriginality: an indigenous peoples' response to social suffering. *Transcult Psychiatry*. 2000;37(1):11–34.
 36. Herbert E, McCannell K. Talking back: six First Nations women's stories on recovery from childhood sexual abuse and additions. *Can J Commun Ment Health*. 1997;16(2):51–68.
 37. Norton CS. *Life metaphors: stories of ordinary survival*. Carbondale (IL): Southern Illinois University Press; 1989.
 38. Roberts G, Holmes J, editors. *Healing stories: narrative in psychiatry and psychotherapy*. Oxford (GB): Oxford University Press; 1999.
 39. Chamberlin JE. *If this is your land, where are your stories?: finding common ground*. 1st ed. Toronto (ON): AA Knopf Canada; 2003.
 40. King T. *The truth about stories: a native narrative*. Toronto (ON): House of Anansi Press; 2003.
 41. Lear J. *Radical hope: ethics in the face of cultural devastation*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press; 2006.
 42. Dion Buffalo YR. Seeds of thought, arrows of change: Native storytelling as metaphor. In: Laidlaw TA, Malmo C, Associates, editors. *Healing voices: feminist approaches to therapy with women*. San Francisco (CA): Jossey-Bass; 1990.
 43. Hodge FS, Pasqua A, Marquez CA, et al. Utilizing traditional storytelling to promote wellness in American Indian communities. *J Transcult Nurs*. 2002;13(1):6–11.
 44. Denham AR. Rethinking historical trauma: narratives of resilience. *Transcult Psychiatry*. 2008;45(3):391–414.
 45. Episkew J. *Taking back our spirits: indigenous literature, public policy, and healing*. Winnipeg (MB): University of Manitoba Press; 2009.
 46. Reid J. *Myth, symbol and colonial encounter: British and Mi'kmaq in Acadia, 1700–1867*. Ottawa (ON): University of Ottawa Press; 1995.
 47. Marshall E, Kirmayer LJ. *Becoming human: the three crosses and Mi'kmaq understandings of resilience*. Montreal (QC): Culture and Mental Health Research Unit; 2009.
 48. Barsh RL, Marhsall JB. Mi'kmaw (Micmaq) constitutional law. In: Johansen BE, editor. *The encyclopedia of Native American legal tradition*. Westport (CT): Greenwood Press; 1998. p 192–209.
 49. Clairmont D, McMillan J. *Directions in Mi'kmaq justice: an evaluation of the Mi'kmaq Justice Institute and its aftermath*. Halifax (NS): The Tripartite Forum on Native Justice; 2001.
 50. Phillips SK. 2000. *The Kahnawake Mohawks and the St Lawrence Seaway* [MA thesis]. [Montreal (QC)]: McGill University.
 51. Alfred T. *Wasáse: indigenous pathways of action and freedom*. Peterborough (ON): Broadview; 2005.
 52. Blanchard D. *Seven generations: a history of Kanienkehaka*. Montreal (QC): Church Baines; 1980.
 53. Wieman C. *Six Nations mental health services: a model of care for Aboriginal communities*. In: Kirmayer LJ, Valaskakis G, editors. *Healing traditions: the mental health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. Vancouver (BC): University of British Columbia Press; 2008. p 401–418.
 54. Peterson J, Brown JSH, editors. *The new Peoples: being and becoming Métis in North America*. Manitoba (MB): University of Manitoba Press; 1993.
 55. Statistics Canada. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census*. Ottawa (ON): Ministry of Industry; 2008.
 56. Russell F. *The Canadian crucible: Manitoba's role in Canada's great divide*. Winnipeg (MB): Heartland Associates; 2003.
 57. Sawchuk J. *Negotiating and identity: Métis political organizations, the Canadian government and competing concepts of Aboriginality*. *Am Indian Q*. 2001;25(1):73–92.
 58. St-Onge N. *Uncertain margins: Métis and Saulteaux identities in St-Paul-des-Saulteaux, Red River 1821–1870*. *Manitoba History*. 2006;53:2–10.
 59. Peters E, Rosenberg M. *The Ontario Métis: some aspects of a Métis identity*. *Can Ethn Stud*. 1991;23(1):71.

60. Vermette A, Ferland M. *Au temps de la Prairie*. Winnipeg (MB): Editions du Blé; 2006.
61. Edge L, McCallum T. Métis identity: sharing traditional knowledge and healing practices at Métis Elders' gatherings. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*. 2006;4(2):83–115.
62. Jessen Williamson K. Celestial and social families of the Inuit. In: Laliberte R, Settee P, Waldram JB, et al, editors. *Expressions in Canadian Native studies*. Saskatoon (SK): University of Saskatchewan Extension Press; 2000. p 125–144.
63. Kirmayer LJ, Fletcher C, Watt R. Locating the ecocentric self: Inuit concepts of mental health and illness. In: Kirmayer LJ, Valaskakis G, editors. *Healing traditions: the mental health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. Vancouver (BC): University of British Columbia Press; 2008. p 289–314.
64. Brody H. *Living Arctic: hunters of the Canadian North*. Vancouver (BC): Douglas & McIntyre; 1987.
65. Berger TR. *Northern frontier, northern homeland: the report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry*. Ottawa (ON): Minister of Supply and Services; 1977.
66. Jessen Williamson K. 2006. *Inuit post-colonial gender relations in Greenland [PhD thesis]*. [Aberdeen (GB)]: Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen.
67. Brody H. *The other side of Eden: hunters, farmers and the shaping of the world*. Vancouver (BC): Douglas & McIntyre; 2000.
68. Williamson KJ, Kirmayer LJ. Inuit ways of knowing: cosmocentrism and the role of teasing in childrearing. In: Worthman C, Plotsky P, Schechter DS, editors. *Formative experiences: the interaction of caregiving, culture, and developmental psychobiology*. New York (NY): Cambridge University Press; 2010. p 299–307.
69. Warren JA, Berner JE, Curtis T. Climate change and human health: infrastructure impacts to small remote communities in the north. *Int J Circumpolar Health*. 2005;64(5):487–497.
70. Ebi KL, Semenza JC. Community-based adaptation to the health impacts of climate change. *Am J Prev Med*. 2008;35(5):501–507.
71. Kirmayer LJ. Psychotherapy and the cultural concept of the person. *Transcult Psychiatry*. 2007;44(2):232–257.
72. Tanner A. The cosmology of nature, cultural divergence, and the metaphysics of community healing. In: Clammer J, Poirier S, Schwimmer E, editors. *Figured worlds: ontological obstacles in intercultural relations*. Toronto (ON): University of Toronto Press; 2004. p 189–222.
73. McCormick R. Aboriginal approaches to counselling. In: Kirmayer LJ, Valaskakis G, editors. *Healing traditions: the mental health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. Vancouver (BC): University of British Columbia Press; 2008. p 337–355.
74. Sioui GE. *For an Amerindian autohistory: an essay on the foundations of a social ethic*. Montreal (QC): McGill-Queen's University Press; 1992.
75. Saul JR. *A fair country: telling truths about Canada*. Toronto (ON): Viking Canada; 2008.
76. Harrison KD. *When languages die: the extinction of the world's languages and the erosion of human knowledge*. New York (NY): Oxford University Press; 2007.
77. Chandler MJ, Lalonde CE. Cultural continuity as a moderator of suicide risk among Canada's First Nations. In: Kirmayer LJ, Valaskakis G, editors. *Healing traditions: the mental health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*. Vancouver (BC): University of British Columbia Press; 2008. p 221–248.
78. Tiessen M, Taylor DM, Kirmayer LJ. A key individual-to-community link: the impact of perceived collective control on Aboriginal youth well-being. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Indigenous and Aboriginal Community Health*. 2010;7(2):241–267.
79. Warry W. *Ending denial: understanding Aboriginal issues*. Toronto (ON): Broadview Press; 2007.

Manuscript received, revised, and accepted March 2010.

¹ James McGill Professor and Director, Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec; Director, Culture and Mental Health Research Unit, Lady Davis Institute, Jewish General Hospital, Montreal, Quebec.

² Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Université du Québec, Montreal, Quebec.

³ Director of the Treaty Beneficiary Association, Eskasoni, Nova Scotia; Community Researcher, Roots of Resilience Project, Eskasoni, Nova Scotia.

⁴ Community Researcher, Roots of Resilience Project, Culture and Mental Health Research Unit, Jewish General Hospital, Montreal, Quebec.

⁵ Assistant Professor, Educational Foundations, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
Address for correspondence: Dr LJ Kirmayer, Culture and Mental Health Research Unit, Institute of Community and Family Psychiatry, 4333 Cote Ste Catherine Road, Montreal, QC H3T 1E4; laurence.kirmayer@mcgill.ca

Résumé : Repenser la résilience d'une perspective autochtone

Les notions de résilience qui sont issues de la psychologie et de la psychiatrie du développement ces dernières années nécessitent d'être systématiquement repensées pour aborder les milieux culturels, géographiques et sociaux distincts, et les histoires d'adversité des peuples autochtones. Au Canada, les réalités sociales dominantes des peuples autochtones incluent leur enracinement historique à un endroit spécifique (avec les terres traditionnelles, les communautés et les transactions avec l'environnement) et les déplacements profonds causés par la colonisation et la perte d'autonomie, l'oppression politique, et le contrôle bureaucratique subséquents. Nous rapportons des observations d'un projet actuel en collaboration sur la résilience dans les communautés Inuits, Métis, Mi'kmaq et Mohawk s qui suggère la valeur d'incorporer des constructs autochtones à la recherche sur la résilience. Ces constructs sont exprimés par des histoires spécifiques et des métaphores ancrées dans la culture et la langue locales; cependant, ils peuvent être encadrés plus généralement dans des processus qui incluent : réguler les émotions et aider à l'adaptation par des concepts de soi et de l'identité individuelle relationnels, écocentriques et cosmocentriques; revoir l'histoire collective de manières qui valorisent l'identité collective; revitaliser la langue et la culture comme ressources d'auto-façonnement narratif, de positionnement social et de guérison; et renouveler la capacité d'agir individuelle et collective par l'activisme politique, l'habilitation et la réconciliation. Chacune de ces sources de résilience peut être comprise en termes dynamiques comme étant issue d'interactions entre les personnes, leurs collectivités, et les systèmes régionaux, nationaux et mondiaux plus vastes qui abritent et soutiennent la capacité d'agir et l'identité autochtones. Cette perspective sociale-écologique de la résilience a d'importantes implications pour la promotion, les politiques et la pratique clinique de la santé mentale.