

(Re)settlement, Displacement, and Family Separation: Contributors to Health Inequality in Nunavut

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Abstract: A series of relocation events in the Canadian Arctic in the mid-twentieth century contributed to widespread disruption of Inuit families. The objectives of this article are to: 1) provide a synthesis of the literature and oral histories about Inuit and Western academic perspectives on family attachments; 2) share findings from a recent study on perspectives of family relationships, which interviewed Inuit parents—many of whom were children at the time the relocation events in the 1950s and 1960s; and 3) discuss the role of severed family attachments on health inequality in Nunavut. The research was conducted within an Indigenous knowledge framework, specifically, the Piliriqatigiinniq Partnership Community Health Research Model (Healey & Tagak Sr., 2014). Data were collected in face-to-face interviews with twenty Inuit parents in three Nunavut communities. An analytical approach building on the concept of Iqqaumaqatigiinniq (all knowing coming into one), “immersion and crystallization,” was used to identify story elements in the data. Parents in the study identified the experience of forced relocation and/or attendance at residential school as traumatic events for families. These events broke the chain of Inuit knowledge transmission, which participants blamed for health inequalities observed in northern communities today. Participants who did not experience relocation attributed their confidence and ability to communicate health knowledge to the bonds they had with their children. Reclaiming and revitalizing Inuit attachment perspectives is part of the path to overcoming the trauma that Canadian Inuit families have experienced, and which is a contributor to health inequality in the region. Focusing on wellness-promoting pathways in our communities can, in turn, help reduce the health inequality gap in the North.

Introduction

Inuit society is relational, founded on a system of kinship relations (NCCA, 2011; NCI & QIA, 2011; Pudlat, 2011; QIA, 2012; Tagalik, 2011). These relations form the basis of a unique attachment philosophy compared to Western academic attachment theory. A series of relocation events in the Canadian Arctic in the mid-twentieth century led to widespread disruption of Inuit families. Relocation events included a formal, federal government-led settlement initiative, mandated attendance of children at residential schools, and medical evacuation for tuberculosis epidemics (INAC, 1996b; King, 2006; QIA, 2010; Sandiford Grygier, 1994). As a result, many Canadian Inuit families were dispersed and separated during this period of time. Today, intergenerational effects stemming from these events persist, and Arctic communities in Nunavut report some of the highest rates of suicide in the world. The mental health and wellness of the population has been an ongoing concern among governments and non-government agencies for several decades (Alianait Inuit-Specific Mental Wellness Task Group, 2007; CCHS, 2003; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Group, 2002; Hicks, 2007; Kral, 2003).

When parents were separated from their children during the settlement and separation events, the development of family attachments was disrupted, threatening the foundation of Inuit kinship society, and ways of knowing, language, and knowledge communication. The objectives of this paper are to: 1) review and synthesize literature and oral histories about Inuit perspectives on the development of family attachments; 2) share perspectives of Inuit parents (many of whom were children at the time of the relocation events in the 1950s and 1960s) from a study on family relationships; and 3) discuss the implications of severed family attachments in Arctic communities.

Background

Inuit are the Indigenous inhabitants of the North American Arctic, and the Inuit homeland stretches from the Bering Strait to East Greenland, a distance of over 6,000 kilometres. Inuit live in Russia, Alaska, Greenland, and the Canadian Arctic, and share a common cultural heritage, language, and genetic ancestry. Before contact, small groups of families travelled together to different camps and hunting grounds. In the Qikiqtaaluk¹ region of the Canadian Arctic alone, for example, Inuit lived in small, kinship-based groups in over 100 locations throughout the region (QIA, 2012). During the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, tuberculosis and influenza

ravaged Canadian Inuit populations (ITK, 2005; Sandiford Grygier, 1994; Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007), and many of the same illnesses continue to present in high numbers in northern communities. That time is well-recognized in Nunavut as marking the beginning of a significant cultural shift for Canadian Inuit from a nomadic, subsistence lifestyle to working and living in communities year-round. The process of relocation to communities, which originally began as a response by Inuit to the presence of traders, explorers, and missionaries, took new form with the systematic efforts of the Canadian government in the 1950s to resettle Canada's North. The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) reports that in these years government administrators were concerned and came to see the North as being in a state of crisis that required immediate attention (INAC, 1996a). The response was to implement resettlement programs in the Eastern Arctic in an effort to: 1) protect Canada's sovereignty after the Second World War; 2) facilitate the opening of trading posts by the Hudson's Bay Company; and 3) police, educate, and provide health care for remote populations (INAC, 1996a; Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000). As a result, Inuit were relocated to southern Canada to cut relief costs and to provide medical treatment for the tuberculosis epidemics; to remote High Arctic regions to maintain sovereignty and support the economic initiatives of the Hudson's Bay Company; and into settlements to facilitate the provision of supplies, education, and medical care. Increased attention was also directed to reports of Inuit starvation as the number of caribou across the North declined and/or migration patterns changed, particularly in the Kivalliq region of central Nunavut (Tester & Kulchyski, 1994).

In approximately the same time period in the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government implemented a policy to remove Inuit children from their families and require them to attend residential school. For some communities, up to three generations of Inuit children were sent away from their families to attend day schools in larger communities (Pauktuutit, 2007). Some children were sent much farther away than the nearest settlement, to residential schools in Churchill, Chesterfield Inlet, Yellowknife, Inuvik, and Iqaluit. Others were sent to live with *Qallunaat*² families in southern cities, such as Ottawa, Edmonton, and Halifax. This caused great anguish for both parents and children (QIA, 2012). Residential schools for Inuit continued to open into the 1960s, and by 1963, 3,997 Inuit children were attending these schools (King, 2006). In June 1964, 75% of Inuit children and youth aged between six and fifteen were enrolled in the schools. These students are the parents and grandparents, uncles and aunts, of today.

This series of events dispersed Inuit families across a vast landscape. The cultural shift that Inuit experienced during this time period threatened the very foundation of Inuit society, knowledge, and ways of knowing. The significantly life-altering movement of Inuit to either southern, High Arctic, or settlement-based locations had an impact on the development of attachments, as well as on the transmission of critical communal knowledge embedded in Inuit kinship society.

Kinship, Relational Knowledge, and Inuit and Western Perspectives on Attachment

Inuit, as with many Indigenous peoples, hold a philosophical view of the world that is relational (Healey & Tagak Sr., 2014; Kovach, 2009; McGrath, 2011; Wilson, 2008). A relational epistemology draws our attention to relational forms of knowing. This differs from the common Western practice of focusing on individual descriptions of knowing (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). In a relational epistemology, knowing is informed by the multiple connections that knowers have with other beings and the environment; by participating in events; and by observing nature such as the birds, animals, rivers, and mountains (Deloria, 1995). Wilson (2008) and Getty (2010) highlight a perspective where knowledge comes from the people's histories, stories, observations of the environment, visions, and spiritual insights. Knowing is something that is socially constructed by people who have relationships and connections with each other, the living and the non-living, and the environment (Chilisa, 2012). Relation building is an essential aspect of everyday life experience for Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2009, 2010; Wilson, 2008).

From a relational knowledge and Inuit epistemological perspective, kinship is the foundation of Inuit social organization (Briggs, Ekho, & Ottokie, 2000; Kral, Idlout, Minore, Dyck, & Kirmayer, 2011; McGrath, 2011). Inuit kinship extends beyond familial affiliation to other non-biological affiliations including adoption, friendship, marriage or partnership, and namesake (Bennet & Rowley, 2004; Emdal-Navne, 2008; Haviland, Prins, McBride, & Walrath, 2010; Nuttall, 1992). In one of the few oral histories of Nunavut that shares the voices of Inuit elders, it is said that Inuit believe that three essential parts make a human: body, soul, and name (Bennet & Rowley, 2004). Kinship and naming are critical aspects of the development of a human being from an Inuit perspective (Bennet & Rowley, 2004; Emdal-Navne, 2008; Nuttall, 1992). A nameless child, for example, is not fully human; giving a child a name, whether before or after birth, makes a child whole (Bennet & Rowley, 2004). Inuit

did not have family surnames before the arrival of Western practices. Instead, each person's single name linked him or her to a deceased relative or family friend, and the spirit of the deceased person lived on in the child (Bennet & Rowley, 2004). Often children carry traits of their namesake or *avrainnuk*,³ such as hunting or sewing skills, and are protected by the name-soul connection (Bennet & Rowley, 2004; Nuttall, 1992; Tagalik, 2011). The relationship between the child and the family of the namesake strengthened family bonds and created extended family kinship, which would support a child throughout life. The name bestowed upon a child was the first step to establish a community around an individual beyond the immediate family and provided connections to, and opportunities to develop attachments with others (Bennet & Rowley, 2004; Nuttall, 1992; Tagalik, 2011). In the case of the custom adoption of a child, for example, a child would have kinship bonds to their birth family, their adopted family, and the family of their namesake.

Inuit elders have spoken passionately and eloquently about the ties of kinship that united families (QIA, 2010). Each person within a kinship group was valued for his or her contribution to the group's well-being and success. Excellence was highly respected, whether it was in hunting, problem solving, leadership, or sewing (Bennet & Rowley, 2004; Briggs et al., 2000; EAC, 2010; J. Karetak, 2013; NCI & QIA, 2011; QIA, 2010; Tagalik, 2011). At the same time, a tradition of humility dictated that gifted individuals should not boast or otherwise demonstrate pride (EAC, 2010; Kalluak, 2010; Tagalik, 2011). Although conflicts were inevitable, they were minimized or resolved as quickly as possible, since they had the potential to put the survival of the kinship group at risk (QIA, 2010).

If kinship relations are the lines that connect people to one another, attachments are the loving and supportive bonds that hold them together over the life course. The theory of attachment originated in the psychology literature to explain both attachment behaviour and enduring attachments that children and adults make to others (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment behaviour is viewed by Bowlby (1982a) as any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is perceived to be better able to cope with the world. The cross-cultural applicability of attachment theory as proposed by Bowlby (1969) has been debated in the literature, and the need for an attachment model that is based on Indigenous values has been noted (Bowlby, 1982a; Cowan, 1997; Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000; Yeo, 2003). In this section, two Inuit attachment perspectives, which articulate Inuit values related to family bonds and kinship relations, are

shared alongside similar concepts from attachment theory: 1) the *puuq* (pouch) and 2) the *Mannik, Ujaraq, Inuk* (Egg, Rock, Able Person).

Briggs (1995) has stated that in traditional Inuit camps, attachments governed social life. In Inuktitut, the word *inunnguiniq* is used to describe the “creation of an able person.” In a discussion about the concept of *inunnguiniq*, family relationships and child rearing from an Inuit perspective, Elders in Nunavut have described a *puuq*, a pouch, which metaphorically hangs around a child’s neck (EAC, 2010; Tagalik, 2011). As a child grows and develops, the *puuq* must be filled with positive articles such as good words, values, love, safety, support, skills, practice, understanding, and knowledge (EAC, 2010; Kalluak, 2010; Tagalik, 2011). These values and tools contribute to the formation of the child’s personality and equip the child with the skills and support they need to engage in positive relationships with others and cope successfully in life, whether it be in times of celebration, or through hardship or illness. Parents, caregivers, and extended family kin make positive contributions to the child’s life and the *puuq* by developing relationships, showing affection, caregiving, teaching, and supporting the child (Kalluak, 2010; Tagalik, 2011). When a child experiences neglect, anger, hurt, abuse, or mistrust, the *puuq* remains empty; thus, the child is not a whole person and, consequently, not able to develop trusting relationships or cope well with life events (Tagalik, 2011).

This perspective from Inuit Elders parallels concepts in the Western academic theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1969). The knowledge that an attachment figure is available and responsive provides a strong and pervasive feeling of security, and so encourages the person to value and continue the relationship (Bowlby, 1982b). Attachment behaviour can be observed throughout the life cycle (Bowlby, 1982b). Since it is seen in virtually all human beings (though in varying patterns), it is regarded as an integral part of human nature (Bowlby, 1982a). Attachment research places significant importance on the caregiver-child relationship (Bowlby, 1982a). The Inuit attachment perspective is extended beyond the caregiver-child relationship to the extended family-caregiver-child relationship(s) through kinship, the naming tradition, and the collective commitment and expectation to fill a child’s *puuq* (J. Karetak, 2013; Tagalik, 2011).

Attachment research separates children into categories of attachment. The “securely attached” child/person comes to see themselves as worthy of others’ attention and sees others as trustworthy and responsive (Bowlby, 1982b). In contrast, the “insecurely attached” child/person displays disorganized attachment patterns and comes to see themselves as unworthy

of others' attention and sees others as unworthy, non-responsive, and perhaps even abusive (Ainsworth, 1989; Alexander, 1992). Similarly, a second Inuit attachment perspective is explained in a story shared by Rhoda Karetak of Arviat, Nunavut, in which she discusses the Mannik, Ujaraq, Inuk (Egg, Rock, Able Person). She shared this story in the context of describing the Inuit concept of *pilimmaksarniq*, the Inuktitut term for the concept of learning skills through practice, effort, and action in relation to child rearing, childhood development, and relationships with others in the community (R. Karetak, 2011). In her story, Rhoda described a child that is like a "fragile egg" who was treated very gently, always careful to never crack the egg, and was protected at all times. This person is not able to cope with hardships later in adulthood. She also described a child that is like a "hard rock," who became shocked or stunned when they were scolded or traumatized. After enduring repeated scolding or abuse, the child became "hardened" to it and unaffected or unemotional, and this person may become dangerous. Lastly, Rhoda described the "able person" who was created from a childhood environment of patience, love, teaching, training, and understanding. In Rhoda's story, the "fragile egg" and the "hard rock" can be seen to be analogous to the insecure forms of attachment and the "able person" is analogous to the secure form of attachment.

When Relations or Attachments are Disrupted

Disrupted attachments in infancy or childhood can have lifelong implications in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969, 1982a; Overbeek, Stattin, Vermulst, Ha, & Engels, 2007; Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001; Schreiber & Lyddon, 1998; Segal, 2001; Tavkar & Hansen, 2011). Overbeek et al. (2007) found, in a longitudinal cohort study of 212 individuals, that negative parent-child bonds were related to low-quality partner relationships and dissatisfaction with life in adulthood. Without intervention, the children continued to express disorganized attachment patterns when they reach adulthood. Furthermore, attachment research has demonstrated that when an adult has a history of disrupted attachments and/or abuse, their children also express disorganized attachment patterns, as well (Lyons-Ruth & Block, 1996; Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001). The implication of disrupted attachments in a relational society, such as Inuit society, is significant not only because of the impact of the severing of family bonds, but because the sharing of knowledge, customs, and practices is dependent on relationships between people (McGrath, 2011). Inuit knowledge is communicated through action and explanation. There was

no written Inuit language until efforts were made by Moravian Brethren missionaries to write Inuktitut in the late-nineteenth century (Harper, 1983). The transfer of knowledge, histories, and skills from one generation to the next was entirely dependent upon Inuit oral history and learning from others (Ajunnginiq, 2006; Kral, 2003; Mancini Billson & Mancini, 2007; NCI & QIA, 2011; QIA, 2010; Tester & McNicoll, 2004). When families became separated during relocation into settlements, when children were taken from their parents and placed into residential schools, and when individuals were sent away for medical care and never returned to their families (INAC, 1996a, 1996b; QIA, 2010; Sandiford Grygier, 1994; Tester & Kulchyski, 1994), the bonds between parents and children were severed, along with the transfer of Inuit knowledge (INAC, 1996b; Kral et al., 2011; Kral & Minore, 1999; QIA, 2010). Changes to family structure have been identified in previous research as a key factor in social problems and resulting health inequalities experienced in northern communities (Arnakak, 2006; G. Healey, 2014b; INAC, 1996a; Kral et al., 2011).

Method

Indigenous knowledge models emphasize the importance of story and metaphor in narrative research (Healey & Tagak Sr., 2014; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). This research was conducted using an Indigenous knowledge model with a focus on Inuit ways of knowing, specifically, the Piliriqatigiinni Partnership Community Health Research Model (Healey & Tagak Sr., 2014). The model highlights five Inuit concepts that informed the research approach: *Piliriqatigiinni* (the concept of working together for the common good), *Pittiarniq* (the concept of being good or kind), *Inuuqatigiittiarniq* (the concept of being respectful of others), *Unikkaaqatigiinni* (the philosophy of storytelling and/or the power and meaning of story), and *Iqqaumaqatigiinni* (the concept that ideas or thoughts may come into “one”). The researcher was born and raised in Iqaluit, Nunavut, is a life-long community member, and has a deep appreciation and respect for the knowledge, people, and places of the North.

To provide a present-day account of family and generational perspectives on the topic of health, relocation, displacement, and relationships, data were collected in twenty face-to-face interviews in three Nunavut communities with Inuit parents who had at least one teenage son or daughter between the age of 13 and 19 years. Of the parents who volunteered to be interviewed for this study, three were fathers and seventeen were mothers. Nineteen of twenty participants did not complete

high school. Eleven were employed in part-time, seasonal, or casual work, three were unemployed, and six were employed full-time. The narratives focused on multiple perspectives, and generational differences, and provided an opportunity for reflection on their own parenting and family experiences. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting chosen by the participant, recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim. All questions were asked in English, and participants responded primarily in English. In the cases where they responded in Inuktitut, the author provided the translation and verified the translation with a person experienced in Inuktitut language translation. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their experiences discussing health and relationships with their children, and they were invited to tell stories about their families and share experiences from their own upbringing. Data were analyzed through a process of immersion and crystallization (Borkan, 1999) which, from the perspective of the researcher, is a process that is analogous to the Inuit concept of *Iqqaumaqatigiinniq*, “all knowing coming into one.” Through a process of listening to interviews, reading and re-reading transcripts and stories, and comparing to the original research question, themes crystalized in the data. A rigorous, respectful, and mindful process was followed for the data analysis, which included the comparison of findings to the known literature on the topic (Creswell, 2013); reflexivity and bracketing of researcher perspectives before and during the study (Mays & Pope, 2000; Meadows, Verdi, & Crabtree, 2003); an iterative data collection and analysis process (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002); and discussion of findings with a subgroup of participants and community advisors (Morse et al., 2002).

In navigating Indigenous and Western approaches to answering questions for this study, it is important to reflect on how narratives from an oral-based tradition are re-told and preserved in a text-based knowledge system, such as a manuscript. The intonation, gesture, and emotional qualities can be lost, and the reader can miss out on the interpretative, interactive, and relational aspects inherent in the person’s story. The stories below are presented in a way that was true to the research model (*Piliriqatigiinniq*), and to the storytellers (*Unikkaqatigiinniq*), and in a way that was true to the analytical process (*Iqqaumaqatigiinniq*). The data are presented as segments of stories told by the participants, along with explanation and contextual information. The sensitive nature of the topic means that preserving the identity and privacy of the speaker is of utmost importance. Large segments of dialogue were not included where the participant made reference to people or events that would identify

families. In the presentation of the findings, the words are kept intact as much as possible without revealing the identity of the speaker.

Findings

Inuit Parent Perspectives on Family Relationships

Participants interviewed for this study shared personal stories of positive and negative family relationships. Some participants shared personal experiences of trauma and separation, and discussed the impact of these events on their family life.

One mother, who did not attend residential school and was not separated from her family, shared her personal story of childhood relationships with Elders. She emphasized the role of family bonds in discussing health, as well as personal safety, with her own children today:

My mother, she really got me scared one time because she really didn't want me to get pregnant because I was too young. So back then when we learned it—I really used to listen to what the elders said or my father said or what my mother said. And we always used to try to listen to them very much, so we really, really, really tried to listen to them and try to do whatever they told us to do. Because we had to listen to our parents. ... I talk to [my children a lot]. They really understand me and it's a good thing they listen to me and my husband. [My husband] he talks [with them] a lot because [he] really loves the kids ... Mostly today just when I'm looking out the window watching the water, watching the birds flying around on the wind or just looking at it—just feeling about it—I think today maybe the younger ones are looking at those who are older now ... We, parents, now—if we say to our children we really love them, we have to explain what is good or what is not good ... So that they understand ... And these other parents talk with their kids and they're understanding and trying to listen to them and make them more safer ... they're not being injured by someone. Because they're looking after themselves. (Mother)

This parent described a direct link between family bonds, positive learning experiences with parents and Elders, and the role of these experiences in her discussions about health and emotional and physical safety with her children. This participant described a loving relationship between parents and children, which translated into a communication pathway for important health knowledge. In the previous quote and in

the quote that follows, parents also commented on the ways in which children today emulate both positive and negative behaviours displayed by their parents. This was discussed in the context of mental health and wellness in the community.

I'm just an Inuk—I'm just a person. ... [And] because we're human beings, we, people, follow what our parents used to do. We follow them. For example, like I'm a mother of my teenage children. I'm a mother. [What] if I try to kill myself with a knife ... [What if] I would maybe try to pretend to try to kill myself with a knife or I try to choke myself ... For example, [if] I try to commit suicide ... and kill myself and one of my kids would try the same thing ... Like me, like that ... They copy their parents. Or for example, if I met up with someone and making babies and all that and children are ... watching me [my actions] ... they will do the same thing as me. Same thing. Generation to generation. So, they will always copy their parents. My grandparents got it from their parents; my parents got it from grandparents. I got it from my parents. My kids get it from me. I'm just thinking. They do what we show them [teach them].
(Mother)

This participant emphasized how knowledge and behaviours are transmitted from one generation to the next, and made note of the type of negative behaviours parents have modelled for their children in her community today, such as suicide attempts. This parent and other participants believed that such behaviours had a direct impact on decision making among the youth members of the community; for example, seeking love and security from a romantic relationship (when not available from parents), or the decision to have a child as a teenage single parent. This perspective contributes to the notion that the children of adults who display disorganized attachment may also develop disorganized attachments, as well (Lyons-Ruth & Block, 1996; Main & Hesse, 1990; Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001).

For the parents in this study, the experiences of family separation during the residential school and settlement era were traumatic. Most of the participants described childhood memories in which their families had been forced to move to a community, or were forced to send them to residential school, or felt abandoned when a family member was evacuated for medical treatment. In the two quotes that follow, parents reflected on how communication previously took place in families, and

the disconnect they now observe between parents, extended family, and children. One participant referred to the children of this era as “the lost generation.”

Nowadays now. It’s scary now. Years ago, it was not scary, but now it’s scary. Years ago it wasn’t like that. It was just normal. But now, it’s a lot of things—more stuff happening in Nunavut. Young people are supposed to learn from their parents. And more parents should be more close to their daughters. Fathers should teach their sons. And ladies always teach your daughters. Men should speak up more. Because they’re too quiet. I’m just thinking maybe men [need more support to] talk more to their sons.”

Um, for instance, young girls I know, and my personal experience with feeling neglected or abandoned, you’re looking for attention or someone to love you and that’s when they start seeking outside the family who would accept them for who they are and love them and I think it has a lot to do with sexual abuse as well ... which is being ignored a lot. I know a lot of the cases are not reported because they are scared to report it ... sexual abuse among youth, now, or their parents’ generation or maybe both. And before—maybe grandparents [experienced sexual abuse, too] ... And it’s not openly discussed because maybe it brings too much pain or memory or I don’t know. And trying to figure out what the root cause ... it takes a lot of research and ... trying to figure out what ways to bridge that gap and be more open about it, too ... In Nunavut, we know there’s a high rate of suicide. There’s a high rate of alcohol abuse. There’s a high rate of drug abuse. And I feel this is just my assumption that the parents who have very little information ... or have very little education background, have very little knowledge and don’t know how to talk to their children because they didn’t receive that from their parents. And—it’s making it harder for parents to try and interact with youth or their kids and they feel trapped. And they don’t know what to do ... the lost generation ... they don’t know what to do and the only way they [adolescents] know to cope is to try and seek for the attention that they’re longing for [from someone else].

Parents discussed the barriers that they felt prevented them from discussing health with their children in the sincere way they wanted to. The barriers they felt prevented meaningful discussions about important

health issues included trustworthiness, confidence, self-esteem, previous or unresolved trauma, and shame. Parents shared a desire to overcome these barriers and use their experiences as opportunities to teach their children.

Discussion

The children of the northern (re)settlement and residential school era are the parents and grandparents of today's youth. For the many who experienced trauma as children during the relocation events, the experience of being separated from their parents was further compounded by the added experience of abuse. The events that occurred in Canadian Inuit history over the past century altered kinship relations, attachments, and created fractures in the Inuit system for sharing knowledge (Bohn, 2003; McGrath, 2011; Tester & McNicoll, 2004). Many adults have struggled with childhood trauma(s) experienced during the settlement and residential school eras and, in previous studies, have reported turning to substances to cope with the depression, anxiety, violence, and stress that they had experienced (Healey, 2006; G. K. Healey, 2014; Kenny, 2006; Kirmayer, Tait, & Simpson, 2009; Kral et al., 2011; Segal, 2001; Waldram et al., 2007; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). For some, the cycle of trauma has continued into the next generation, perpetuating the rift in kinship relations, in relational society, and in the transmission of knowledge and philosophies pertaining to health and wellness (Kral et al., 2011; Pauktuutit, 2003, 2007; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 2009). Previous research has suggested that the impact of societal, cultural, and familial disruption at the time of settlement had a lasting impact on parents' ability to communicate with their children in a meaningful way (G. Healey, 2014a; Healey, 2015; Steenbeek, Tyndall, Rothenberg, & Sheps, 2006).

The settlement and residential school era fractured Canadian Inuit family bonds and disrupted parent/child/extended family attachments by separating young children from their parents, and the community, for extended periods of time (INAC, 1996b; QIA, 2010). Attachment theorists believe that in such instances, if children are unable to find a secure, safe, and loving attachment figure, they may develop a disorganized attachment pattern (Alexander, 1992; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1969, 1982b; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Haft & Slade, 1989; Yeo, 2003). The literature states that parents with a disorganized attachment pattern behave in a way that the children may perceive as threatening—for example, if their behaviour is erratic, conflicting, or unreliable, or in more extreme cases,

abusive or frightening to the child (Main & Hesse, 1990). In a study in the United States, Main and Hesse (1990) found that unresolved trauma and loss in a parent's life was the best predictor of disorganized attachment between a parent and child.

However, not all Inuit were separated from their families or attended residential school during the relocation events, and every Arctic community has a unique (re)settlement history related to, for example, their location; exposure to infectious illness; access to harvesting areas; and presence of authorities, explorers, or trade (INAC, 1996b; QIA, 2010; Sandiford Grygier, 1994; Tester & Kulchyski, 1994). Therefore, some important Inuit concepts, such as *inunnguiniq*, the *puuq*, and the *Mannik*, *Ujaraq*, *Inuk*, for example, remain in the collective memory of Elders and community members.

As part of a movement to reclaim and share Inuit knowledge and ways of knowing, *Nunavummiut*⁴ have been working most recently to revitalize Inuit perspectives on family and attachments by sharing *inunnguiniq* perspectives through books, DVDs, parenting support programs, and resources to make the material more accessible to those who do not have access to it through the traditional oral storytelling pathway (NCCAH, 2011; QHRC, 2012). Such initiatives include camps and land-based activities that celebrate the role of the land in the holistic Inuit wellness perspective, and in the sharing of Inuit skills and knowledge with both youth and adults (Ilisaqsivik, 2010a, 2010b; Kalluak, 2010; Mearns, 2013). Increasingly, works are being published that incorporate multimedia, film, information technology, and written text to share Inuit stories, philosophies, knowledge, art, practices, and humour with community members and with the next generation (Arnaquq-Baril, 2010; Bennet & Rowley, 2004; Briggs et al., 2000; Christopher, McDermott, & Flaherty, 2011; IBC, 2013; Kalluak, 2009; Kunuk, 2001; NCI & QIA, 2011; Ootoova, Atagutsiak, & Ijjangiaq, 2001).

In reflection upon the relocation and settlement time period in Inuit history, Inuit have since celebrated a collective resilience in the face of their societal devastation (Ajunginiq, 2006; Korhonen, 2008; Olofsson, Holton, & Partridge). The resilience, strength, and capability of Inuit has become the focus of community-led initiatives to reclaim family relationship perspectives, kinships, creativity, Inuit skills, harvesting, and education (Arnaquq-Baril, 2010; Canada, 2001; Communities of Arctic Bay, Nickels, Furgal, Buell, & Moquin, 2005; ITK, 2011; Kral & Minore, 1999; Kral et al., 2009; QHRC & ARVIAT, 2014). Parents in this study described a connection between kinship relations, family attachments,

community wellness, and sexual health. Public health interventions that mirror community-led initiatives to revitalize Inunnguiniq could be very effective and make a positive contribution to family relationships by strengthening the knowledge-sharing pathway between parents/caregivers, extended family, and children for the purposes of sharing health and wellness knowledge.

Limitations and Considerations

This article includes a select review of the literature and oral histories about Inuit attachment perspectives in Nunavut. It is not necessarily representative of the perspectives of all Inuit communities across the Arctic. Similarly, interviews were conducted with the Inuit parents who volunteered to participate in three Nunavut communities, and their perspectives are not necessarily representative of all Inuit.

Conclusion

Inuit society is founded on a system of kinship relations, and these relations form the basis of a parent/child/extended family attachment philosophy. Separation and relocation during the settlement period traumatized families and disrupted family bonds, ways of knowing, languages, practices, the sharing of knowledge, and the essence of Inuit society by separating parents and children for long periods of time (Arnakak, 2006; Dorais & Sammons, 2000; G. Healey, 2014b; G. K. Healey, 2014; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Kral et al., 2011). Rebuilding family attachments and community relationships can make a positive contribution to achieving health equality by enhancing family networks and revitalizing millennia-old pathways for sharing knowledge and holistic perspectives about health and wellness. The promotion of Inuit stories, wisdom, and practices is part of a collective movement to reclaim Inuit attachments and kinship in today's communities, which can have a positive impact on community health. Focusing on strengths and wellness-promoting pathways and philosophies in our communities can, in turn, help reduce the health inequality gap in the North.

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Notes

1. *Qikiqtaaluk* means “big island” and is the Inuktitut word for Baffin Island.
2. *Qallunaat* is the Inuktitut word that is commonly used for “white person” or “non-Inuk.”
3. *Avainnuk* is one of a number of Inuktitut terms used to refer to the “namesake” relationship that two individuals may share.
4. *Nunvummiut* is the Inuktitut term for “people of Nunavut.”

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