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"The Weight on Our Shoulders Is Too Much, and We Are Falling"

Suicide among Inuit Male Youth in Nunavut, Canada

Inuit youth suicide is at an epidemic level in the circumpolar north. Rapid culture change has left Inuit in a state of coloniality that destabilized their kin-based social organization, and in spite of advances in self-governance social problems such as suicide continue. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork I carried out in Nunavut, Canada (2004–2005), including 27 interviews with Inuit between the ages of 17 and 61, I examine male youth in particular in the context of recent colonial change, gender ideologies and behavior, youth autonomy, and the family. Anger is common among Inuit male youth, often directed toward girlfriends and parents, and suicide is embedded in some of these relationships. Many Inuit male youth are struggling with a new cultural model of love and sexuality. Inuit speak about a need for more responsible parenting. Evidence is beginning to show, however, that local, community-based suicide prevention may be working. [suicide, Inuit, youth, gender, colonialism]

Research suggests that colonial suppression of culture and identity, racism and discrimination, and intense surveillance and control of Indigenous peoples in Canada has led to poor mental health outcomes (Kirmayer et al. 2009). Inuit in Arctic Canada have experienced a turbulent acculturation process over the last several decades. Prior to this, Inuit had been living in traditional family camps on the land, influenced from the late 1800s through the 1950s by whalers, missionaries, the fur trade, and the police. Inuit endured much social and economic change because of these outside forces. The fur trade collapsed in 1929 and again in the early 1980s, and severe disease epidemics continued into the 1950s (Remie 1994; Wenzel 1991).

The great social transformation, the most rapid and profound in Inuit history, took place during what Wenzel (1991) has termed the government era, starting in the late 1950s when the federal government began to control Inuit lives. The government era began during a tuberculosis epidemic that was at its peak during the 1950s. Inuit were relocated from their family-based camps on the land to aggregated settlements initially run by *Qallunaat* (White) federal government northern service officers. Children were sent to residential or federal day schools. Abuse took place in the residential schools. A family allowance program began, replacing the fox fur

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trade that ended in the 1950s as the primary source of income (Damas 1996). In the new wage economy, high unemployment led to the creation of poverty in the Arctic (Graburn 1969). In the early 1970s at the end of the government takeover, Inuit perceptions of *Qallunaat* were that they were feared (Remie 1994). Among Inuit, this internal colonialism has had its most disruptive effects on kinship and social organization (Condon 1988; Graburn 1969) and has taken much control away from them over their lives (Brody 1991; McElroy 1975; Wenzel 1991). The most negative effects can be seen among Indigenous youth (Condon 1988; Waldram, Herring, and Young 2006).

The suicide rate of Inuit in Arctic Canada is among the highest globally. For Nunavut, Canada's Arctic territory, between 1999 and 2003 it was 122.5 per 100,000 (Nunavut Bureau of Statistics 2003). The median age for suicide among Inuit in Nunavut is 20 and continues to decline. The suicide rate for Inuit youth is up to ten times the national rate, with males comprising the majority of suicides (Kral and Idlout 2009). The suicide rate began to climb in Nunavut in the mid-1980s. There are very few suicides recorded before 1980 (Working Group 2009); however Balikci (1970) found suicide and suicide attempts among the Netsilik Inuit, 50 cases between 1920 and 1970. He indicated that Netsilik suicides were different from other Inuit suicides because they were not elderly, which was more typical, but spanned the adult age range. Balikci attributed most of the suicides to Durkheim's (1951) egoistic type of suicide, of not belonging or being socially isolated. Suicide rates across the communities in Nunavut vary dramatically, and some communities have no suicides at all. Nunavut is a large territory with a population of about 29,000. Eighty-five percent of the population is Inuit, and their population in most of the 26 communities is 95%.

The suicide rate for Canada in 2008 was 11.1 per 100,000, 16.8 for males and 5.5 for females (Statistics Canada 2012). Langlois and Morrison (2002) report that Canada is slightly below the midrange of suicide rates for countries on suicide data kept by the World Health Organization. Males are four times as likely to die by suicide, and the most common suicide method nationally is hanging (39%) followed by poisoning (26%) and firearms (22%). Of the provinces, Quebec has the highest rate at 21 and Newfoundland has the lowest at 7. The suicide rates for Canadian Aboriginal youth are among the highest in the world, and suicide rates vary markedly across communities. Risk factors for completed and attempted suicide are similar to those for youth in general, and they include interpersonal conflict, unresolved grief, family instability, depression, alcohol abuse or dependence, unemployment, and family history of psychiatric disorder (Kirmayer 1994). Yet the causal factors behind Aboriginal suicide have been attributed to colonialism and rapid social change with cultural discontinuity, suppression of traditional knowledge and identity, poverty, and racism (Kirmayer 1994; MacNeil 2008; Tester and McNicoll 2004). Kral (2012) shows how colonialism has negatively affected family, romantic, and interpersonal relationships among Inuit, leaving youth feeling isolated. Indeed, suicide among Aboriginal peoples in Canada has historically been tied to colonialism (Erickson 2005). Health disparities for Canadian Aboriginal peoples are considerable, and Aboriginal health is worsening (Lix et al. 2009). Frolich et al. write that "perhaps the most direct indicator of acute social suffering in Aboriginal Canada is suicide" (2006:136).

Substance use and abuse is known to be a factor in suicide. Conwell et al. (1996) found that 47% of suicides in the United States ages 15–29 had a substance use disorder, which has been found to predict suicides in other research (Runeson 1990). In Nunavut, it has been found that 21% of suicides were linked to alcohol abuse. Cannabis use is high in Nunavut, and 49% of suicides were using this (Chachamovich 2012). An earlier study of suicide in Nunavut found that 57% of suicides had no alcohol in the blood and 33% were above the legal impairment level. Forty-six percent had a history of alcohol abuse (Isaacs et al. 1998). The Isaacs et al. study found that precipitating the suicides were most commonly relationship breakup or family problems (36%) and pending criminal proceeding (21%).

Suicide rates are elevated for Indigenous youth across the circumpolar north, from the Eveny in Siberia (Vitebsky 2006) to Yup'ik and Inupiat in Alaska (Bjerregaard et al. 2004; Wexler et al. 2008), to Inuit in Canada (Kirmayer et al. 1998) and Greenland (Bjerregaard and Lynge 2006; Leineweber et al. 2001), to Sami in Norway (Silviken et al. 2006). Suicides have been increasing in the last few decades among Indigenous peoples globally, primarily among male youth. Male suicide is more common than female suicide in most countries across time. Aboriginal youth suicide in Australia increased dramatically after 1980 (Czechowicz 1991), and Hunter and Milroy (2006) attribute much of this to the negative colonial impact on family life. Similar suicide increases have been seen among Indigenous youth in New Zealand (Beautrais and Fergusson 2006), Brazil (Coloma et al. 2006), and Pacific Islanders (Else et al. 2007).

Loneliness has been attributed to many Indigenous suicides (Bjerregaard and Lynge 2006; Kral 2003). Alacántara and Gone (2007) link cultural discontinuity to the transformation of personal and collective identity, leading to suicide and other forms of distress. The effect is most debilitating on personal continuity: Chandler et al. (2003) found that a lack of temporal coherence in identity, or how one sees oneself over time from self or collective constructs to roles and responsibilities, is tied to suicidality.

It is reported that most completed suicides have suffered from a mental disorder (Cavanagh et al. 2003; Harris and Barraclough 1997; Runeson 1990); however much of the research is based on interviews with bereaved survivors rather than a diagnosis of a living person. Hopelessness has also been found to predict suicide (Beck et al. 1990; Beck 1986). It is unclear to what extent these risk factors are implicated in Indigenous suicides. Chachamovich (2012) found that almost 50% of Inuit suicides in Nunavut were depressed.

Those who committed suicide and the reasons for the act were entirely different in the Inuit past. It usually took place among the ill and elderly. Cases are found in the literature, such as the ill elder who asked his son to kill him or an ill woman left to die in the 1860s, which was witnessed by the American explorer Charles Francis Hall (Loomis 1971; Nourse 1879; see Kellehear 2007), and in the 1920s Rasmussen (1929) described an assisted suicide in Igloolik in which an ill woman was strangled by a family member. The earliest account I found was by the French fur trader Nicolas Jérémie, who in the late 17th century observed suicides among Inuit of old people assisted by their children (Wallace 1926). A motivation for such deaths included the desire of ill elderly to relieve their families of the burden of having to take care of them in times when food was scarce. Malaurie (2007:137) referred to

this as dying with "ancient dignity." Violent deaths, including suicide, were said to have a "purifying effect" and victims went to an even better place after death (Rasmussen 1929:96). Inuit youth did not kill themselves. Suicide among elderly Inuit today is rare.

In this article, Inuit male suicide in Nunavut is investigated from the perspective of romantic and family relationships in the Nunavut community of Igloolik. Research questions addressed are (1) What has changed since the Canadian colonial encounter of the 1950s and 1960s? (2) What is the nature of distress or perturbation among Inuit male youth today? (3) Given the finding that the most common trigger for Inuit youth suicide is breakup or trouble in romantic relationships (Kral 2003), what are some of the dynamics of these relationships related to distress and suicide? This study looked particularly at male youth in their romantic relationships. Male youth were investigated because they are at the highest risk for suicide, and as a male ethnographer I had a rapport much closer with young males than with females.

Field Setting

Inuit narratives included here are from ethnographic fieldwork in the community of Igloolik, Nunavut, in 2004–05. Igloolik is north of the Arctic Circle at 69° latitude, with a population of about 1,700. About 96 percent of the population is Inuit. Most Inuit had moved from the land to the Igloolik settlement by the late 1960s. Although the primary language is Inuktitut, Iglulingmiut (Inuit of Igloolik) also speak English except for the eldest members. Unemployment is close to 50 percent, and 65 percent of the residents receive income support (Takano 2005). Less than a quarter of adults has graduated from high school, and the median age is 18 (Kennedy and Abele 2010). All houses have modern amenities, and there are two large stores selling everything from groceries to clothing to guns for hunting. Iglulingmiut continue to hunt "country food" from the land, particularly seal, walrus, caribou, and char. Igloolik is in the middle range of suicide rates across communities in Nunavut, in which the suicide rates per 100,000 ranged from 0 to 325 for 1999–2003. The rate for Igloolik was 125.

Method

I lived in Igloolik and used ethnographic methods for nine months, interacting with Inuit on a daily basis, which included sharing many meals, working on community projects, hunting on the land, building igloos, and having continuous conversations. I have conducted fieldwork and participatory research with Inuit in Igloolik since 1997. Twenty-seven Inuit community members between the ages of 17 and 61 were interviewed in depth—11 females and 16 males. Nine were in the 17–24 age range (all male), 9 were 25–44, and 9 were over the age of 45. The interviews were conducted in English and were recorded digitally and transcribed. The only criterion for inclusion was having an interest in the project, and most Inuit I spoke with had such an interest. They were selectively recruited from the local Ammitiq Youth Society, from Inuit counselors at the Department of Social Services, and from among Inuit adults I was in regular contact with, who in turn recommended other Inuit. Interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes or in the researcher's place

of residence. The interviews included open-ended questions about (1) change and stability in family relationships since the settlement began in the 1960s (targeting middle-aged and elderly), and (2) family relations today and romantic relationships among youth, especially males (targeting all ages). Suicide was asked about in the context of family and romantic relationships. HyperResearch qualitative analysis software employing coding was used to analyze the interviews and the field notes, and narrative themes were categorized by content. All coding was done by the author. Interviewees did not provide feedback; however the codes and themes and interpretations were discussed and consensus was reached with three primary Inuit research collaborators. Two of these collaborators reviewed and approved this manuscript, one of whom is from Igloolik. This study was in partnership with Embrace Life Council, an Inuit organization in Iqaluit, Nunavut, for suicide prevention and community wellness.

Findings

Suicide is culturally scripted in Nunavut as it is everywhere, both in motivation and method. Most suicides take place during the night when the family is asleep, where young Inuit typically hang themselves quietly on the clothes rod in their bedroom closets, facing the wall on the left side. The body is discovered by family members in the morning. Not many suicide notes are found, but the few I have seen in the coroner's files have thematically been about broken love relationships. Romantic, family, and intergenerational relations are described below together with suicidality in the context of colonial change.

Youth Romantic Relationships

Inuit youth and adults reported that suicide is most closely associated with romantic and then family relationship problems. Most Inuit who had made suicide attempts indicated that they had been experiencing romantic relationship problems (Kral 2003). Inuit more generally spoke about suicide in terms of aloneness, romantic relationship problems, and family problems. The concept of suicide was expressed by Inuit saying suicidal people felt unloved, rejected, shamed, hopeless, and angry. Anger was prominent. Romantic relationships among youth vary from being calm, loving, and committed to those that are volatile, violent, and easily broken. Too many are of the latter type. In a review of coroner files, the breakup of these relationships was found to have precipitated 68 percent of suicides in Igloolik and another Inuit community during 1980–98, while 20 percent had a pending court appearance (Kral 2003).

A 55-year-old woman, working in the role of a traditional counselor in the community and seeing many young people, spoke of hearing young women talk about their boyfriends making suicide threats. She said that a boyfriend would sometimes threaten, "If you leave me I'm going to kill myself." This counselor added that she was "shocked" by these statements, which are new. She found that parents were at times threatened by their sons in this way, often for not giving them more money. Another traditional counselor, a woman in her mid-fifties, said that some young men "get mad about something and right away they are saying, 'Boring,

I'm going to suicide. I'm really going to suicide for sure if you don't do what I want.' And they take their expression out." During my fieldwork in Nunavut I heard young Inuit speak of their romantic relationships as being extremely important to them, and often marked by jealousy, anger, and possessiveness. Possessiveness and control of romantic partners is now largely a male trait among youth. Inuit counselors reported that this is uncommon among female youth. Several times young Inuit women told me that they had been threatened by their male partner with suicide in the context of their perceived unfaithfulness. One 17-year-old Inuk male talked about the rampant jealousy among youth, "Because they're too serious with their relationships." Another male, age 18, felt that most of the love experienced by youth comes from these romantic relationships rather than from their families.

A male, age 19 and a student in grade 12, talked about anger among youth. "I can see some guys controlling their girlfriends, like I really don't like what they do to their girlfriends, like controlling them." I asked why he thought these boys want to control their girlfriends. "Maybe they try to control their girlfriends because they really want to be with that girl and don't want to let go." He said that they are afraid the girl will leave them, and the control is about "not wanting the girl to talk to any other guy other than the guy they're with." The anger was about jealousy and worry that the girl will "try to go for the other one." Jealousy, according to Bhugra, is a socialized, threatened, and anxious insecurity about "what you have and do not want to lose" (1993:271). It is an ambiguous emotion because it contains both love and hate (Yates 2000), and Hupka (1991) reported that it is not dominant but secondary to the emotions of anger and sadness. A collective romantic insecurity appears to have become common among many Inuit male youth. Niezen (2009) argues that suicide may indeed be a way of belonging among youth in some Indigenous communities, and this might also be the case for the particular male norm of control and possession of girlfriends.

Family

Family problems were another reason that many youth and adults believed was behind suicide. One Inuk male, age 26, reported,

> What I think is that whenever a person gets into a relationship, what I think, personally, is that they're trying to get away from either parents or brothers and sisters. So they can have a calmer life. But then when they break up they have to go back to the violence at home. They have no other place to turn to. Maybe they're not being taught about the other choices. Parents should take responsibility.

Another youth, age 18, talked about why he thought youth were angry. "I would say family problems. Parents arguing or fighting, and maybe not enough communication with your family, like talking about their problems. Youth, they just want to do things on their own." He indicated that he had heard "I hate you" from his parents many times, and that they had told him to kill himself. I spoke to one mother whose son killed himself after not being able to be with his girlfriend. She told me with great sorrow that she had told him during an argument he should

kill himself. This woman was significantly abusing alcohol and had said this while she was drunk.

Many parents reiterated the sentiment of poor parent–child communication. A 55-year-old woman admitted that she and her husband had not spent much time with their children. "We don't have time. We never sit down and talk to them about the facts of life. I don't push them into listening to me when they don't want to. They're not so interested in what we have to say anymore." Another woman of the same age said that the teachers took over from parents, and parents let the teachers do this by backing off. She talked about following her parents' instructions when she was a child living in the camp, emphasizing that parents were once in control of their children. "If the younger people today would listen better to the adults, they would have a bit more understanding of where they had to go." From what I have learned from youth in Igloolik, they spend very little time with their parents. Only three generations ago, the parent–child bond was extremely important.

One woman, age 50 and known for speaking her mind, turned to parental responsibility.

> We always say that young people, they're doing this and they're doing that. It's as if teenagers just materialized? Naa. It had started with the family. That's what we have to deal with. It's not the young people. It's the parents who are not spending really much of any time with their children. We the parents should be apologizing or feeling remorseful for the things we have done to our children. Because we didn't know any better. If we started doing that, the youth would be more stable. We the parents should be the ones to initiate that. Because our youth did not just make it up. It happened within families. There are some things that happened within the family structure that affected them so. Of course we had problems too, but we have to acknowledge that to our children. The obstacles that we had to go through.

This woman had been in residential school. It is interesting that a few other middle-aged women also spoke about apologizing to their children. As a 46-year-old man pointed out, "In our culture, it's not right to be alone. You need to have family. That is, for Inuit, number one."

Intergenerational Segregation

Inuit see intergenerational segregation as a new problem (Kral et al. 2011). It is a concern among colonized Indigenous peoples (Haebich 2000; Jolly and Macintyre 1989). Different generational memories hamper communication across ages (Connerton 1989). By the 1980s, Condon (1988) found that Inuit adolescents rarely spoke with their parents anymore. Young people are feeling "caught between two cultures," a common expression among Inuit, and many middle-aged Inuit are unhappy about their having been taken from their families when they were children to attend school. Many elders wait, often alone, for visitors who now come infrequently. An Inuk man in his late fifties thought that "the closeness of the family is not there anymore." He said that you used to know all your relatives, and now you don't often even know your next of kin.

One young Inuk, age 21, talked about the problems of his grandparents' generation pressing down on his parents' generation, and these in turn pressing down on his generation: "The weight on our shoulders is too much, and we are falling." A middle-aged woman the same age as his mother said that Inuit of her parents' generation "were directionless" once they came to the settlements. The young man above reported that his generation of young people are unable to carry this cross-generational load any longer. Twelve of his friends had already killed themselves, and he had tried it himself on four occasions. He also spoke of often seeing his father beat his mother while he was growing up. Domestic violence is one form of response to colonialism that has been documented among Indigenous peoples, particularly men beating their female partners (Cowilshaw 2003; Harvey and Gow 1994; McClusky 2001). It appears that among Inuit in Nunavut, domestic violence began in earnest when the children of the residential school era became adults in the 1970s and 1980s. The shoulder metaphor offered by this young man deserves to be unpacked, investigated, and responded to.

Contagion

Like emotions including anger (Hatfield et al. 1994), news of a suicide can be contagious (Gould 2006; Phillips 1974). It can also appear in time–space clusters in Indigenous communities (Hunter and Harvey 2002), which is more common among adolescents (Gould et al. 1990). Suicide has become a common means of expressing perturbation among young Inuit. Many Inuit youth and adults spoke of youth copying each other in suicide. A few young Inuit explained that a friend of theirs killed himself or herself in order to be with someone who had died by suicide, a friend or relative. Sometimes a suicide will occur within months to a year after an earlier suicide. This is how cluster suicides take place. Such mimesis can take place within a group or community, what Kral (1994) refers to as suicide's social logic, the internalization of the idea of suicide (Kral 1998). Some Inuit described seeing their dead friends visit them, usually at night, asking to join them in death. These apparitions were described in another Inuit community by Stuckenberger (2005). Suicide for some has become a shared response to distress, and as Niezen (2009) wrote, a way of belonging and identifying with similar others.

Discussion

The family has been the foundation of Inuit social life and central to Inuit traditional knowledge (Boas 1964; Bodenhorn 2000; Briggs 1994; Damas 1968; Saagiaqtuq et al. 2001). This is so for Indigenous peoples in North America more generally, for whom rules of behavior have traditionally been determined by the kinship system (DeMallie 1998; Eggan 1955; Miller 2002). Cross-generational relationships were critical, and "child attitude of respect for parents was paramount," while grandparents were seen as "the primary repositories of wisdom and knowledge" (Burch 1975:155; Collings 1999). Inuit children learned most of their knowledge and skills by observing and interacting with their parents, knowledge they then passed down to their own children. Profound change has taken place in the Inuit family. While family remains at the center of well-being for Inuit (Kral et al. 2011),

parenting, child–parent communication, and intergenerational segregation have become problematic. This is commonly discussed by Inuit elders; as the late elder Luke Anautalik said, "Our children do what they want nowadays. Even though we try and talk to them, they don't listen to us at all." Elder Josie Angutinngurniq added, "Our children just turn away because they don't want to hear" (Oosten and Laugrand 2007:83–84).

Following the government era of crowded settlements, Inuit youth began to manifest problems as they grew up together in very large numbers for the first time, producing a new "teenage subculture" (Condon and Stern 1993:391). In Igloolik in 1960, arranged marriage was still being practiced, but some of the children were beginning to refuse these marriages (Malaurie 2007). In the early 1970s, Brody (1991) saw young Inuit couples "in an atmosphere heavily charged with powerful, desperate feelings" modeled after romantic relationships among youth in the south and filled with emotional intensity. This intensity was new for Inuit.

O'Neil (1983:259) found conflict concerning arranged versus chosen marital partners among young Inuit in the early 1980s. He saw that romantic relationships continued to be emotionally charged and highly meaningful to Inuit. He found that young Inuit males were angry with females their own age. Autonomy of teenagers from parents increased. After TV was introduced in one Inuit community in 1980, Condon (1988:150) found that sexuality became public through hand-holding, hugging, and kissing, where "in all probability, these new forms of dating and emotional expressiveness were acquired by watching these new forms of entertainment." Prior to this boys and girls were rarely seen together in public. Now, love became an important criterion for marriage.

The American model of love has been described by Swidler (2001) as based on a culture of voluntarist individualism, where one is in control of selecting one's mate and "how individuals choose" is the common narrative. This culture of love comes with expectations of stable, monogamous relationships. For Inuit, romantic individualism thus begins to conflict with the central importance of kin and community and the recent history of arranged marriage. Such conflict between arranged and love marriage is seen elsewhere, such as India (Donnor 2002). Graburn (1969) saw that over 40 years ago Inuit youth were already left confused and without parental or cultural models for sexuality and marriage. By 1990, arranged marriage had almost completely disappeared. Whereas Inuit youth 30–40 years ago still asked their parents' permission for choosing a partner (Graburn 1969), youth today are left on their own in these decisions and their outcomes.

In this study it was found that many Inuit male youth express possessiveness and control over their girlfriends and too often the threat of suicide. These threats are often carried out. Have Inuit male youth modeled their fathers' aggression toward their mothers in another form? Suicide appears to be centered on feeling alone and unloved and may at times include anger turning into a form of revenge. If jealousy is seen as a "fear of loss of something one possesses" (Storr 1988:113–114), there is a division of genders concerning sexual possessiveness, and jealousy appears to be gendered. Future research needs to investigate more closely the appraisals Inuit male youth make that lead to jealousy. Male proprietariness over females has been linked to violence (Guerrero et al. 2004), yet violence in Inuit romantic relationships, more common among the middle aged, has yet to be investigated in any depth

(Burkhardt 2004). Among youth the violence is toward the self, what Tester and McNicoll (2004) refer to as the traditional suppression of expressed anger turned inward. The troubled romantic relationships among Inuit youth may stem from other problematic family relationships.

I did not see much alcohol use or abuse among Inuit youth in Igloolik and suspect that most suicides are alcohol-free. Most coroner reports of suicides in Nunavut do not report any blood alcohol levels, and one study found most suicides to have an absence of alcohol (Isaacs et al. 1998). Yet Egeni (2011:74) reported 81 percent of Inuit suicide victims in a small survey in Nunavut were "intoxicated with drugs or alcohol prior to suicide." It was not indicated how these data were collected and no details were given. The common drug in Nunavut is marijuana. Alcohol appears to be more of a problem for the middle-aged, residential school generation.

Although this study is primarily about male Inuit youth, suicide also takes place among female youth. One of the last suicides in Igloolik was a 13-year-old girl who hanged herself in her school after classes had ended. Some Inuit told me that her parents were separated and living elsewhere, and she had been living with her aunt. I was told that she had been sexually abused. Sexual abuse is rarely spoken of in Inuit communities, yet an association has been found between sexual abuse and suicide attempts for Inuit females (Kirmayer et al. 1998), and Chachamovich (2012) found that 44.2% of suicide cases in Nunavut had been sexually abused. The prevalence of sexual abuse is higher among Indigenous Canadian women than non-Indigenous women (Young and Katz 1998). Others have found that young Inuit women also kill themselves following trouble in romantic relationships (Kolb and Law 2001).

Why are young males coping more poorly than females? This gendered pattern of differential adjustment to acculturation among Inuit began when the government era started, with males having more difficulty adjusting to the change (McElroy 1977). The process of colonization disrupted the traditional gender order in Indigenous societies, and much of this remains to be documented (Connell 2000; Gregor and Tuzin 2001; Stolen and Vaa 1991; Tuzin 1997). Continuity in gendered behavior among Inuit has held more for females than males: it became more unstable for males by the late 1960s in the Canadian Arctic; with boys perceiving themselves less like adult men than girls perceived themselves like adult women (Condon and Stern 1993; McElroy 1975). Indigenous men have fared worse than women following colonization (Brave Heart 1999; Carter 1996; Gregor and Tuzin 2001; Lowe 2003; Spindler and Spindler 1958; Tuzin 1997). Brody (1991) indicated that male status among Inuit decreased as hunting became more sporadic. Indeed, the words "man" and "hunter" in the Inuit language of Inuktitut are derivative of each other, and hunting has decreased among Inuit male youth. Colonization has been gendered, so that Indigenous masculinity has been devalued (Brody 1991; Kapila 2005; Lawrence 2003; Martinez and Lowrie 2009; Said 1978). Other gender-related behaviors changed within Inuit settlements. Women were bonding in larger groups, while men would be away more often and for longer periods of time. Mothers became the primary caretakers of children, a task that was more evenly shared with men before the settlements. Through the churches, women organized themselves in various groups, including bible study and sewing. Men were less involved in

settlement church activities. Women began to gain community leadership positions within and because of these groups (Matthiasson 1972).

Given current problems of intimate partner violence among Inuit and other changes in gender roles (Burkhardt 2004), it is important to inquire about precolonial gender relations. Very little gendered violence was found in traditional Inuit society (Briggs 1970; Brody 1991); however Balikci (1970) reported cases of wife beating and maltreatment of women among Netsilik Inuit. Much of the violence today among couples, primarily middle aged, is associated with alcohol (Burkhardt 2004). Despite the finding that gender egalitarian societies do not exist, Ortner (1996) found that an egalitarian hegemony has existed in some non-Western societies. While male dominance takes place in some areas in these cultures, she argues that in prestate societies women had "a certain edge of power" (Ortner 1996:49). Historical accounts of gender relations among Indigenous peoples have been written through a colonial lens, and Bell (2002) notes that while knowledge of such early relations is difficult to acquire, precolonial Indigenous women had greater power and prestige. Briggs (1974) noted that Inuit women traditionally had much autonomy, power, and respect. Women were shamans along with men. Gender styles were highly differentiated yet interdependent and complementary, and couples valued each other's work. Guemple (1995) saw equal status and power across gender among Inuit even though the husband had more influence overall and boys were more privileged. Gender relations may not have been equal in all contexts; however Balikci describes the couple historically as "the basic collaborative unit" in Inuit society (1970:103).

In spite of serious social problems, symbols of renewal are also prominent among Inuit (Briggs 1997). Inuit have become active in suicide prevention, and evidence is accumulating that suicide prevention works in Indigenous communities when Indigenous communities are in control of essential services and their own governmental process (Chandler and Lalonde 1998). Outside mental health interventions do not work well in these communities (Gone 2008), but they can be successful when the community shapes them from the inside (Gone 2011; Wieman 2009). Inuit communities are beginning to implement their own activities and programs for suicide prevention, with some success (Inungni Sapujjijit 2003; Kral and Idlout 2009). This has also been seen in Alaska, where Indigenous community wellness teams are building their own programs (Statewide Suicide Prevention Council 2002). Personal control is essential for mental health (Vaillant 2003), and these are examples of collective control and agency, fitting with the larger project of Indigenous reclamation (Niezen 2003). Further documentation of Indigenous suicide prevention is now called for.

Conclusion

Suicide among Inuit is a form of postcolonial social disorder, resulting from a new social order that followed the government era in the Canadian Arctic (see Good et al. 2008). Although in the Western mental health system suicide is viewed as being based on individual psychopathology (Oquendo et al. 2008), among colonized peoples it is viewed in part as stemming from dispossession (Sinclair 1998; York

1989). Such social transformation and change is seen by Alexander (2004) and others as historical or cultural trauma. Institutions such as residential or boarding schools changed parenting for the survivors, whereby many became less involved and supportive of their children (Brave Heart and Yellow Horse 2003). This intergenerational transmission has taken place through a loss of social control, self- and collective efficacy, and social support (Raphael et al. 2007), as well as changing models of parenting, patterns of emotional expression, identity, and increasing disempowerment (Kirmayer et al. 2007).

This study and other research shows that Inuit have experienced massive social change since the government era began in the 1950s. This is a form of coloniality, the darker side of modernity described by Mignolo and Tlostanova (2008), in which groups of people continue to be dispossessed in their interpersonal relations and distant from larger organizational and state powers. The most notable and negative effect of the colonial wound among Inuit appears to have been on family relations, a serious form of cultural discontinuity. Although land claims and political advances have been made by Inuit in Arctic Canada, numerous social problems remain, including poverty, intimate partner violence, and suicide. Many male youth are angry with their girlfriends and parents and feel lonely and rejected. It is within these relationships that suicidality manifests itself. Many romantic relationships among Inuit youth are more troubled than they were for their parents when they were young. An important cultural discontinuity is in romantic or affinal and parent–child relationships. There is a need for an Aboriginal focus on suicide and suicide prevention (Elliott-Farrelly 2004).

The French poet Paul Valéry once wrote that the future is not what it used to be. This is especially true for Inuit youth. In his book on the Crow Nation, Lear (2006:83–84) noted that "a culture tends to propagate itself, and it will do that by instilling its own sense of possibility in the young," adding that colonialism can result in "the breakdown of a culture's sense of possibility itself." Each living generation of Inuit in Canada has had a vastly different developmental experience. Continuity of self has been linked with continuity of culture (Chandler et al. 2003). The loneliness, anger, and perceived rejection reflect feelings of not belonging. This is Durkheim's social integration that protects one from suicide. Baumeister and Leary (1995) theorize that the universal human need to belong is essential for well-being, and belongingness holds for many different contexts. Yet suicide is mimetic, and Inuit youth copying each other, joining hands in death, is a form of negative belonging (Niezen 2009). Much research is needed on the anthropology of suicide.

The evidence demonstrating that Indigenous community control over resources, including suicide prevention, is related to fewer suicides is a call for community empowerment (Rappaport 1987). Inuit youth need parental and other adult mentoring, in keeping with traditional child rearing, and communities need to work together toward their well-being as they define it. Health Canada's National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy reflects a larger move in this direction, so that communities are funded for developing and running their own programs and activities for suicide prevention and youth well-being (Kral et al. 2009). This self-determination is what Indigenous organizations and communities have been moving toward for years (Champagne 2007; Niezen 2003). Resilience among Inuit youth

needs to be investigated and will likely come from both adult caring and collective action.

Notes

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