

UNIQUE PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE ACROSS CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

An international mixed methods study of resilience of 14 sites in eleven countries identified seven tensions that youth resolve in culturally specific ways. Resolution of these tensions is foundational to experiences of resilience. This paper reports on the qualitative findings from interviews with 89 youth. Results support a culturally embedded understanding of positive youth development that better accounts for young people's resilience in western and non-western countries. Specifically, the seven tensions identified include: access to material resources, relationships, identity, cohesion, power and control, social justice, and cultural adherence. Findings show that no one pattern in the resolution of these tensions predicts resilience better than another. A case study of a Palestinian boy demonstrates the intersection of the seven tensions and the uniqueness of their resolution. The implications of this work for interventions is discussed.

Early conceptualizations of resilience identified mostly individual, or individually mediated factors, that were associated with positive outcomes (Anthony, 1987; Kaplan, 1999). A healthful temperament, psychological well-being, and a safe and nurturing family environment were all found to predict individual success following exposure to acute and chronic adversity such as abuse, violence, parental mental illness, poverty or war (Garmezy, 1983; Quinton, Rutter, & Gulliver, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). A second "wave" of resilience research focused on protective factors and processes, emphasizing the temporal and relational aspects of positive development under stress (Rutter, 1987; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles & Maton, 1999). More recently, work by Lerner and Benson (2003), Luthar (2003), Rutter (2005), and Author

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(2001, 2004) has introduced a more ecological interpretation of resilience. Resilience is both an outcome of interactions between individuals and their environments, and the processes which contribute to these outcomes. Outcomes and processes are both influenced by children's context (the well-being of their community as well as the capacity of social institutions such as schools and the police to meet children's needs) and culture (the values, beliefs, and everyday practices associated with coping) (Boyden & Mann, 2005; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998; Sonn & Fisher, 1998; Wolkow & Ferguson, 2001). Thus, we say the young boy growing up in an inner-city slum who stays in school and avoids the perils of drug addiction and delinquency is resilient given the risks he faces. Positive outcomes such as these that reflect the values held by those in his community indicate resilience. So, too, do the processes that contribute to that success: engagement with adult role models at school; association with nondelinquent peers; and parents who monitor the boy closely. Resilience is, therefore, both a characteristic of the individual child and a quality of that child's environment which provides the resources necessary for positive development despite adverse circumstances.

A shift in focus from individual characteristics to protective factors, and finally to health resources and assets in a child's community, has taken place in mostly western contexts. Culture has been treated as either a confounding variable or the focus of detailed study in order to understand how cultural minorities vary in their functioning from more mainstream groups (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Researchers have contrasted positive outcomes for ethnic and racial minorities with those of "healthy" white middle-class heterosexual, able-bodied populations growing up in western societies. This has resulted in a narrow set of indicators being associated with resilience such as: self-esteem, school performance, attachment to family, marriage, and civic engagement. As Boyden and Mann (2005) and Ungar and his colleagues (2005a) have argued, we have not adequately understood people's own culturally determined indicators of resilience.

In this paper we report on the qualitative findings of a 14-site, 11-country study of resilience among youth ages 12-23. Results support a fourth wave of resilience research, one that is sensitive to culturally embedded definitions of positive development found in both western and non-western countries and among indigenous and nonindigenous peoples. We hypothesize that resilience is not only an individual's capacity to overcome adversity, but the capacity of the individual's environment to provide access to health-enhancing resources in *culturally relevant ways*.

Specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

1. How is resilience defined by different culture groups or disadvantaged communities?
2. Are there global and/or culturally specific aspects of resilience?
3. What unique outcomes are associated with resilience in specific cultures and contexts?
4. What unique processes are associated with resilience in specific cultures and contexts?

Cross-cultural Studies of Resilience

As Wyman (2003) tells us, "In our future efforts to investigate resilience trajectories—and in our efforts to promote them—we should remain attentive to the fact that processes that are beneficial to children in one context may be neutral, or even deleterious, in another" (p. 314). Sensitivity to the need for heterogeneity is evident in the work of many of the best-known resilience researchers. Werner & Smith (1982), for example, conducted a five-decade study of a birth cohort on the island of Kauai in Hawaii. And McCubbin and his colleagues studied American minorities including people of African, Hispanic, and Native ancestry. McCubbin (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer, 1998; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Futrell, 1998) writes, "applying standard measures to families of color has numerous limitations, just as there are limitations in taking African-American family and youth measures and applying them to other racial or ethnic groups. This . . . suggests the need for a planful effort to develop measures which include ethnic considerations, but which are directed at common features of youth and family coping common across groups" (McCubbin, Fleming, Thompson, Neitman, Elver & Savas, 1998, p. 322). While noteworthy, these efforts have been the exception rather than the rule. Little systematic study has looked across populations, especially those in non-western countries, to investigate resilience as culture-dependent.

A culturally embedded understanding of resilience has appeared in a number of recently published qualitative studies dealing with resilience-related themes (Ungar, 2003; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005). For example, Burton, Allison, and Obeidallah (1995) explored the social context of African-American positive youth development. They asked the provocative question, "How does social context influence the developmental experiences of poor African-American, Hispanic, Native-American, Asian-American, or White adolescents?" (p. 119). They held nine focus groups, conducted individual interviews with members of 48 African-American families with an adolescent child (age 10-18), and engaged in observation of family and community events and rituals.

Their results show that life-course transitions and the markers of such transitions associated with adolescence are culturally determined. Transitions into and out of adolescence occur in the context of ideology, role expectations, behavioral practices, and factors related to “individual and familial responses to surviving in economically deprived and high-risk environments. . . .” Furthermore, they argue that “identifying the contextual meaning of adolescent development among specific racial/ethnic and economic subgroups is an important and necessary enterprise in developing theories that are sensitive to the experiences of non-White and poor teens” (p. 120).

It is interesting that while Burton et al., identified how cultural messages, peer relationships and personal perceptions among African-American youth shape definitions of acceptable, or normative, culturally specific development, the developmental pathway of the urban African-American teen is problematized in the literature as non-normative (Dei, Massuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997). The slow, even plodding and arrested developmental trajectory of more privileged (most often white) youth is accepted as the benchmark of success. This, despite arguments that such normative development delays psychosocial functioning and contributes to adolescent anomie (see Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Levine, 2005).

Studies from outside North America are demonstrating the need for sensitivity to culture and context in studies of healthy development. Challenging a Eurocentric bias in the literature, researchers are gathering stories of successful adaptation from vulnerable populations globally. For example, Klevens and Roca (1999) studied the life histories of 46 young men who had been exposed to violence in Bogata, Colombia in order to understand their use of violence later in their lives. As they show, “qualitative methods for data collection and analysis . . . avoid imposing foreign variables and hypotheses in this new context and . . . allow new variables to emerge from the data” (p. 313). Similarly, by using interviews and observation, De Antoni and Koller (2000) documented the many ways Brazilian street children survive through attachments to one another when caring adults are unavailable. In Israel, Apfel and Simon (2000) interviewed 10 Israeli and 10 Palestinian children to contrast their responses to the danger they face and to understand how each copes. Felsman (1989) interviewed 300 street children under the age of 16 in Colombia and concluded that gang affiliation might actually be a protective factor: “children do not band together to fight and steal; rather, they band together to meet primary physical and emotional needs not being addressed elsewhere” (p. 66). Such studies as these demonstrate the need to understand

children's adaptations as influenced by their culture and context, including their access to the resources necessary to sustain healthy development.

METHOD

Employing integrated qualitative and quantitative methods, the International Resilience Project has examined culturally and contextually specific understandings of resilience. In this study, culture is understood as the customs and traditions, languages and social interactions that provide identity conclusions for individuals and groups. Context, as distinct from culture, is the social, temporal and geographic location in which culture is manifested. The 14 communities involved were each invited to participate based on the variability each brought to the study. Children in each community were thought to be exposed to different kinds of risk in differing amounts. While a sample of convenience, only communities that brought social, geographic, or cultural variation to the study were asked to participate in data gathering. Sites included Sheshatshiu, an aboriginal community in Northern Canada; Hong Kong, China; East Jerusalem and Gaza, Palestine; Tel Aviv, Israel; Medellin, Colombia; Moscow, Russia; Imphal, India; Tampa, USA; Serekunda, the Gambia; Njoro, Tanzania; Cape Town, South Africa; Halifax, Canada; and Winnipeg, Canada (two sites with urban aboriginal youth, the other with non-aboriginal youth in residential care).

The study was designed through face-to-face and electronic discussions between members of the global research team from 2002 to 2003. Local Advisory Committees (LACs) in each site helped to tailor methods and select participants in ways reflecting local norms and ethics. LACs were asked to identify youth participants who were at an age when they were making the transition from childhood to adulthood. Because of cultural differences which determine when this transition takes place, sampling included youth ranging in age from 12-23. Across all 14 sites, 89 youth participated in individual interviews.

Youth who were thought to be "coping well with adversity" were recommended to the study by either a member of the research team or the LACs. Each LAC identified a list of significant risk factors known to influence youth in their communities. A short list of these risk factors includes poverty, war, social dislocation, cultural disintegration or genocide, violence, marginalization, drug and alcohol addictions, family breakdown, mental illness of the child or parent, and early preg-

nancy. Youth who had experienced at least three culturally significant risk factors and showed signs of successful coping (as judged by community members and professionals) were invited to participate in the research.

Depending on their capacity to carry out the research, site researchers contributed as few as two and as many as 24 participants to the qualitative study. Both boys ($n = 32$) and girls ($n = 57$) were sampled. While the number of youth sampled in some sites was small, the purpose of the study was not to understand resilience widely in each site, but to distinguish commonalities and differences among a global sample. Elders, adults in each community identified as having something important to say about resilience (spiritual leaders, health care professionals, parents), were also interviewed individually ($n = 13$) or in focus groups ($n = 5$). Records of discussions by the LACs were also made and included in the data. Detailed notes made during site visits by members of the research team were also part of the data collection.

An innovation of this research was that the methodology was designed iteratively, with team members helping to identify culturally embedded ways to gather qualitative data. A “toolbox” of techniques appropriate in different settings was developed. These included the use of photovoice techniques, games, talking circles and other indigenous communication tools. Though instructions on their use were provided, all sites used only individual interviews and focus groups for data collection (see the section on limitations at the end of this article for discussion). Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours.

To ensure consistency in the focus of data collection activities across all sites, a short list of nine “catalyst” questions was developed collaboratively by all members of the research team. Interviews covered all nine questions, though the order and emphasis changed depending on the characteristics of the youth and the context in which the interviews took place (the child’s culture, the setting for the interview, time constraints). These nine catalyst questions were:

1. What would I need to know to grow up well here?
2. How do you describe people who grow up well here despite the many problems they face?
3. What does it mean to you, to your family, and to your community, when bad things happen?
4. What kinds of things are most challenging for you growing up here?
5. What do you do when you face difficulties in your life?
6. What does being healthy mean to you and others in your family and community?

7. What do you do, and others you know do, to keep healthy, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually?
8. Can you share with me a story about another child who grew up well in this community despite facing many challenges?
9. Can you share a story about how you have managed to overcome challenges you face personally, in your family, or outside your home in your community?

To each question were added probing questions. Researchers also added their own questions as required.

Participant confidentiality was assured through the coding of interviews. In order to protect children from possible repercussions to their participation in communities where their affiliation with the researchers could be misinterpreted as informing on their peers, and because many of the at-risk youth sampled did not have caregivers available, signed consent was not required. However, all youth were informed in simple language of their rights as participants and possible dangers. Agreement to participate was witnessed by a third party other than a member of the research team. In many cases, this was a teacher, helping professional or member of the LAC. In most cases interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

Data Analysis

When necessary, data were translated into English in order to facilitate cross-site comparisons. Transcripts were then coded using Glaser and Strauss' (1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) procedures to generate grounded theory. Constructionist advances to these procedures were also used as discussed by Charmaz (2006) and Clarke (2005). A coding structure was developed in Halifax first by team members there. This list of codes and several sample interviews were then sent to team members in different sites for them to recode. The final selection of codes was then negotiated. By exchanging transcripts of interviews between sites, researchers were able to assist with the comparison of themes and make interpretations that reflected their social and cultural location. These steps ensured the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data analysis was guided by Glaser and Strauss' constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Both sensitizing concepts (those derived from previous studies to inform the present study) and indigenous concepts (those that arose directly from the data collected in the present study) were used to identify dominant themes. Emergent indigenous and sensitizing themes were then contrasted through a process that unitized and categorized thematic constructions (Rodwell, 1998). The study was

purposefully designed so that data were triangulated both within sites (by LAC members and adult focus groups) and between sites, through a collaborative analysis of the transcripts. Face-to-face meetings of all team members in June 2005 further facilitated discussion and agreement on interpretations of the data. Our intent was to incorporate multiple viewpoints to avoid biases of any one stakeholder (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Combined, these data collection and analyses procedures were developed to meet the research goals to understand both within site and between site tensions between homogeneity and heterogeneity.

Findings

Working across so many cultures simultaneously created a rich discursive space to deconstruct the term resilience and the methods for its study. It was recognized that finding one uniform explanation for what constitutes resilience would be neither likely nor desirable. While the multinational team acknowledged the dominance of westernized conceptualizations of resilience as an intra-psychic construct (see Ungar [2004] for a critique), such models were rejected when our data failed to support them. In letting the data speak, a more contextually relevant understanding of resilience emerged. Allowing that the ensuing analysis relates only to this sample at this point in time, our interpretation suggests seven *tensions* that provide a conceptual map for our findings (see Table 1). Each participant's story gave context-specific illustrations of these tensions. Though these tensions were found in every culture involved in this study, each tension exerted differing amounts of influence on the narratives presented by the participants.

Findings show that *youth who experience themselves as resilient, and are seen by their communities as resilient, are those that successfully navigate their way through these tensions. Resilient youth find a way to resolve all seven tensions simultaneously according to the strengths and resources available to the youth individually, within their family, community, and culture.* It is the fit between the solutions youth try, and how well their solutions address the challenges posed by each tension, within the social and political constraints of their community, that contributes to a young person's experience of resilience. *The data reveal no evidence that one way of resolving these tensions is better than another.* There is no causality or linearity, meaning that each youth or adult whose words were captured during the study spoke of the unique ways they succeeded in overcoming adversity. Therefore, while there is evidence of all seven tensions at play in the lives of participants, we understand resilience to be the contextually dependent opti-

Table One: Seven Tensions

Tension	Explanation
1. Access to material resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of financial, educational, medical and employment assistance and/or opportunities, as well as access to food, clothing and shelter
2. Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with significant others, peers and adults within one's family and community
3. Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal and collective sense of purpose, self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, beliefs and values, including spiritual and religious identification
4. Power and control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences of caring for one's self and others; the ability to affect change in one's social and physical environment in order to access health resources
5. Cultural adherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adherence to one's local and/or global cultural practices, values and beliefs
6. Social justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences related to finding a meaningful role in community and social equality
7. Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing one's personal interests with a sense of responsibility to the greater good; feeling a part of something larger than one's self socially and spiritually

mal resolution of the tensions as they are experienced across cultures and contexts. Viewed this way, there is no objective criteria for evaluating positive outcomes since it is up to the individual (influenced, of course, by culture and context) to appraise whether his or her life at that point in time is successful. Furthermore, we found the tensions to be dynamic, converging in different ways across time. Thus, we speculate that, developmentally, optimal resolution of all seven tensions changes as children mature.

Below is a brief discussion of each tension. While it is necessary for the sake of presentation to treat each tension independent of the others, in fact they interact. To understand them, one must appreciate the interplay of culture, context, and an individual's strengths. This interactional view permits us to better understand the life-world (Habermas, 1979) of young people living as far apart as South Africa and Florida or Colombia and Hong Kong. A case example of a Palestinian boy, to be presented later, will illustrate how the narrative of a young person can be interpreted in ways that account for the intersection between the tensions.

Seven Tensions

Access to material resources is defined as the availability of structural provisions, including financial assistance and education, as well as basic instrumental needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing, access to medical care and employment. Getting one's instrumental needs met requires two things: first, the material resources required for survival are available and accessible; second, the individual has the personal resources to avail him- or herself of those resources (e.g., money, motivation, transportation, the right to freedom of movement within one's country). Perception of what is and is not a "need" varied across contexts. Such perception influenced how participants experienced whether their needs were being met. The following are illustrations of how youth in the study understood their needs for material resources and negotiated for them.

A Russian boy said: "I doubt it seriously that one can achieve anything without finances in Russia . . . It's clear how all of my friends were matriculated—not without their parents' and grandparents' support. And I'm no exception here." A Tanzanian girl (referring to the lack of instrumental support from her father) told researchers: "He was not serious with my studies like buying for me the exercise books or school uniform." A South African elder, commenting on her son's success at school, said: ". . . it all just boils down to one old thing. It's just the poverty. Really, it's just poverty because I can tell you from my own personal experience, it's not an easy thing to be poor—so poor that you don't even have a job. It's not easy. Because I've got a son . . . he failed matric [his studies]. He was so despondent. He was almost like a weakling . . . He would just tell me, 'Ma it's because sometimes I sit in school and I think when I come home there's no bread to eat.' You know, that tore me apart."

Relationships figured prominently in young people's accounts of how they cope with their surroundings. Whether these relationships are with family members, peers, elders in the community, teachers, mentors, role models, intimate partners, and/or foes, it is through these relationships that access to resilience-related resources is facilitated. Frequently, these relationships in and of themselves are the resources youth said they need to face challenges in their lives. For example, emotional support available through relationships helps to address needs for comfort, trust, a sense of belonging, love, care, and compassion. By way of illustration, a Colombian boy told interviewers about his relationship with his mother: "My mom told me that when I was a boy, she remained always with me. I slept with her and I cried when she did not come back from her friend's house. My mom has always

worried about me and she becomes sad for my problems.” A girl in Florida spoke about the emotional support she felt when she shared her concern with others: “I let a lot of things build up sometimes and when I talk to someone, I just kind of let everything out and that helps me relieve a lot of stress. I sometimes talk to my mom or I talk to my sister or my boyfriend or something like that. Somebody I feel close to and I can trust.”

Identity. In this study, nurturing and maintaining a sense of individual identity, as reflected in statements such as “I am . . .”, “I believe . . .”, and “I feel . . .”, emerged as one of the tensions managed by youth as they seek a position from which they can experience a sense of themselves as healthy despite exposure to risk. Centered on experiences and conceptions of the “I,” this tension varied widely across cultures, noticeably more easily recognized and articulated in contexts influenced by western ideals of individualism and competition, and less relevant in cultures where collective identity supersedes a focus on the individual. A young Indian woman said: “I am quite independent. I look for emotional support from people when I am unhappy. I know that I cannot depend on anyone financially, so I try to make my ends meet with whatever money I earn.” These same themes echoed in the words of a Halifax girl who said: “Independent just doesn’t mean that you get it for yourself. Independent means that if you need something, you ask, kind of thing. You ask for help. That’s independent, being responsible.” Combined, these narrative data provided a way of understanding the young person’s personal compass when navigating life’s challenges. A South African girl said: “I often stand up for myself because, if you don’t stand up for yourself, then you actually don’t mean anything, because you allow other people to rule your life and so, no, you do it . . . That’s why you must stand up for yourself to show that you are a person and that you are in control of your life.” A girl from Florida said: “I just need to focus on whatever I want. If I can focus on what I want, I can do it. Because there is nothing to stop me. I got this far, right, by focusing on what I wanted. So if I just focus, I get whatever.”

In contrast, a Palestinian youth spoke of identity without any reference to the “I,” and always in recognition of his role as a part of the collective political movement for a Palestinian state independent from Israel. Self-efficacy was measured in terms of his contribution toward that collective goal. His identity as an individual appeared to be irrelevant to his sense of well-being.

Cohesion. The convergence of one’s sense of responsibility to self and a philosophy of duty to one’s community’s greater good is captured

under the concept of cohesion. This tension represents neither “self” nor “other” exclusively. Like a coin with two sides, the concept of cohesion is meant to capture how one engages with the collective in ways that fulfill community and cultural expectations. It encompasses an orientation to group life that is bigger than the “I” and yet includes the “I.” Therefore, it also includes aspects of a youth’s religion or spirituality. It can be demonstrated through the words of a young Tanzanian woman who said: “My way forward is to be engaged in an income-generating activity and stop dependency on my mother . . . [Then] I can instead take care of my mother and my juniors.” It is also a critical factor in the case study that follows.

Many participants spoke at length about their experiences of religion as contributing to their sense of cohesion. For example, an adult in Halifax noted the role of his church in contributing to a sense of connection within his community: “When I grew up, the game was that you grew up in your neighborhood and went to school, played, and went to the same church. Parents knew each other and there was respect. But then when you went to one of the two high schools, you were up against a different situation and people from the south end were the party types and on student’s council and it was hard to break into the social circles. So, the church had a lot of activities and helped to keep things in balance.”

Power and control refer to the capabilities within, and the resources surrounding, the participants to experience material and/or discursive power in terms meaningful to their context. For example, a Tanzanian teenage mother said:

I was married [to] one gentleman and after a week of my marriage I went to take care of my sick grandmother living in Machame. We were living in Majengo. When I returned to my marital home, I noticed that some of my dresses in my bag and my picture were missing. When I asked my husband where these things were, he claimed not knowing. I was told by others that while I was away, there was another woman living with my husband. I thought if the marriage had not even lasted for one week and it was already marred, there was no need to continue with the marriage. So I returned home.

A young Russian man said about his going to university: “I am here because I’ve been working towards it for many years. And it takes me a long time. I guess I made it, thanks to my persistence, tenacity, concentration, or perhaps my stubbornness.” Similarly, a young man from Delft, South Africa, wove together themes of identity with access to material resources and power and control when he said:

I did not want to change my life. My sisters and family looked at me as just another . . . child in the house. But look, I now stand in front of you with a complete mind, with a sober mind. I know what it is to grow up, what it is to be a teenager. I see the picture in a complete thing. I see them now . . . they will always have great respect for me, and the community as well. People never thought that I could do it. People never knew. They never knew what I was capable of doing. I did not know myself either. I am today what I am. And I am proud of myself. Why? Because I can work, and in Delft, to do such things is not for everyone. So, my people never saw what I was capable of doing, understand? Today they can see that there is a light shining in me.

Cultural adherence has two distinct themes throughout the narratives. First, adherence or opposition to global culture is either a barrier or a pathway to resilience, depending on the link between this tension and others. For example, Gambian elders worried that youth were too quick to endorse "all things western." Meanwhile, a young Indian woman said that global culture could be either accepted or rejected, but not ignored: "Whatever is shown on TV is for everyone to watch. It depends on whether you want to take it positively or negatively. You have to find out the truth of what is being shown and judge it yourself." And an elder from India, when asked if he thought American television channels such as MTV had contributed to the drug and violence problems in his community, responded: "No, just watching will not create the problems. When we imitate the western culture, there the problem starts."

Second, local cultural adherence was understood by the participants as comprising all aspects of ethnic, family, or community identification that were distinguished from aspects of global culture. In some cases, local culture was very clearly identified, as when youth stated their tribal affiliation or national identity. In other cases, local and global cultures became confused, as when children expressed a strong desire to stay in school even though the community, but not their family, placed little value on education. Adherence to one's local culture (whether family- or community-based) might vary regardless of whether the youth also adhered to the global culture. Balancing one's identification with local or global culture was not necessarily mutually dependent. Participants demonstrated their ability to identify with one or the other, or both simultaneously. Resilience was accounted for as the capacity to effectively cope with both identifications, in whatever pattern that would fit best culturally. For instance, a Gambian girl explained that her father had supported her getting an education, even though others in the community thought girls should not study, placing the girl's family's culture (which we may say is congruent with global

culture) in conflict with local customs and traditions. Very differently, a young man from Sheshatshiu spoke about his community's increasing emphasis on Innu culture:

We have the greatest culture in this country. When we are in the bush, we have no time for booze, drugs or other problems that are in our community. The youth enjoy the nomadic lifestyle of our ancestors. It is peaceful, quiet, and relaxing. We are free of negative things. My parents take us camping for 3-4 weeks at a time. They make sure that it doesn't interfere with our education too much. The culture and its history are no longer taught in the school because there is no teacher. I know some people who have quit school because they can't learn their own culture and way of life.

Participants from western research sites commented less directly on culture, whether local or global. However, their relationship to western or "Americanized" aspects of global culture was evident in their narratives when they discussed what they did to achieve resilience. For example, a young woman from Halifax explained resilience in highly individualized ways that appeared to reflect cultural norms relevant to western conceptualizations of success, and which de-emphasized obligations to one's community.

I'm learning a lot to just accept the idea that everything is neutral and that there is no good or bad; it's just each individual perspective of the matter. And keeping in mind that everything is neutral, you don't really get so caught up in fears so much and it also helps you understand and accept that every other person will have their own individual perceptions. Like one person may consider one thing is good while another person may consider that thing is bad. And you can't say, 'Well, no, this is right.' OK well, that's right for you but maybe it's not really right for me.

In contrast, a different set of cultural norms was evident in the narratives of some non-western youth. A young Tanzanian woman, for example, who had a child, was clear that in her country premarital sex is unacceptable: "To the community of Njoro, a pregnant girl means a tramp, indecent. I was pregnant before being married, and when I was at home, old people and my fellow young people advised me to undergo abortion, a thing I hated to do. It is bad for a girl without a husband to be pregnant."

Social justice is a theme that captures experiences of prejudice and dynamics of sociopolitical context encountered individually, within one's family, in one's community and culture, as well as experiences of resistance, solidarity, belief in a spiritual power, and standing up

to oppression. To illustrate, a Palestinian boy spoke of the political turmoil and violence he had experienced as part of his daily existence: "One of my friends fell martyr only forty days after the martyrdom of his brother. I feel sorry for his mother . . . He used to be my close friend. We used to drink and eat with each other . . . I cried a lot when I visited him at the hospital and cried more when he was buried . . . My dream is to see Palestine free." A Colombian boy, seeking justice for the violence perpetrated against him, said: "God forgive me, I don't wish death to anybody, but this guy, see . . . I hope God will take him right away forever. I hope so . . . as long as they kill him . . . After they kill him, I will be happy."

The Intersection of Tensions in Narratives

If one looks at each tension individually as presented above, the most important finding from the study will be missed: *the seven tensions interact with one another*. It is suggested that resilience is about finding a way to "hit your stride" and live with relative comfort despite contradictions and conflicts: to continue to negotiate and navigate one's way through the challenges one is experiencing. The data provide snapshots of how participants navigated their way to health resources and negotiated for the provision of those resources in ways meaningful to them (Ungar, 2005b). While the influence of western culture propels us toward categorizing resilience as an end-state, a place where youth "arrive" and never look back, youth in this study did not understand resilience in that way. Instead, collectively, their narratives suggest that resilience should be conceived as a dynamic state of tension between and among individuals, families, communities, and their culture. Resilience is not a permanent state of being, but a condition of becoming better. It is within the intersections of the seven tensions that the richer layers of what constitutes resilience across cultures and contexts are revealed. The following case study illustrates the interplay between these tensions and how each is manifested in different ways, contextually bound and culturally embedded.

Saleem: Saleem is a 14-year-old male living in a Palestinian refugee camp. He attends grade eight at the local school and lives with his mother and father and six siblings. The family's only source of income was the meager wages the father earned as a driver. Within this context, Saleem made no reference to his access to material resources, which suggests that, according to his perception of his world, his instrumental needs had been met in the refugee camp. He said he had shelter and access to education, and food was available. From his van-

tage point as a 14-year-old, he did not feel particularly disadvantaged. The refugee camp where he had lived his entire life also provided access to sporting activities and a close-knit network of friends. A local organization called the Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYLARA), that identified Saleem for inclusion in the study, has provided the boy with opportunities to become involved in innovative media projects.

While Saleem painted a relatively positive picture of his living situation, adults in his community did not. They saw their lives in a sociopolitical context mired in the collective social injustices experienced by the Palestinian people. While there were no measures individual boys such as Saleem could take to address or resolve such systemic social injustices that contributed to him and his family living in perpetual danger, Saleem spoke of small collective acts of resistance that contributed to his sense of power and control. For example, his relationships with others in the refugee camp connected him to a collective cause. Both this identification and his experiences of power and control contributed to his feelings of self-efficacy and access to political power that buffered the effects of the social injustice he experienced. These negotiations for experiences to support health took place, of course, within a context that had disenfranchised Saleem. As Saleem explained:

I lost my best friend who was shot by the Israeli army. While we were demonstrating against the closure on president Arafat, my friend was shot dead and fell martyr. I remember we were fighting over who shall carry the flag during the demonstration . . . I was shot on the spine by a rubber bullet which causes some pain to me between now and then . . . When I take part in a funeral, I become more angry especially when I come across the sad mother of the martyr. The situation makes us think of death, but since we fear God and feel sorry for our families, we realize the importance of continuing our education.

Other aspects of Saleem's life contribute to his sense of power and either support or hinder his capacity to participate in the uprising against Israeli forces. His somewhat conflicted relationship with his father, for example, which includes physical punishment, has remained a resource: "Although my father beats us sometimes, he treats us as his friends. He always talks with us about his work and advises us to be good at school, to pray, and not to trust all people." Relationships like the one between Saleem and his father are reportedly typical of youth in the camp. Staff at the local recreation center who participated in focus groups explained that the physically harsh treatment by

fathers was balanced by “warm relations and support from mothers.” Children also garnered emotional support through strong peer relationships which filled emotional gaps when fathers were “away in the army,” “imprisoned,” or “martyred.” Very clearly, one observes in Saleem’s narrative, and those of others in his community, the necessity to account for the social and political marginalization that Saleem had experienced if one is to understand Saleem as a resilient Palestinian boy. To be resilient in this context is more or less achievable to the extent that the conditions of war have allowed Saleem to realize a state of well-being.

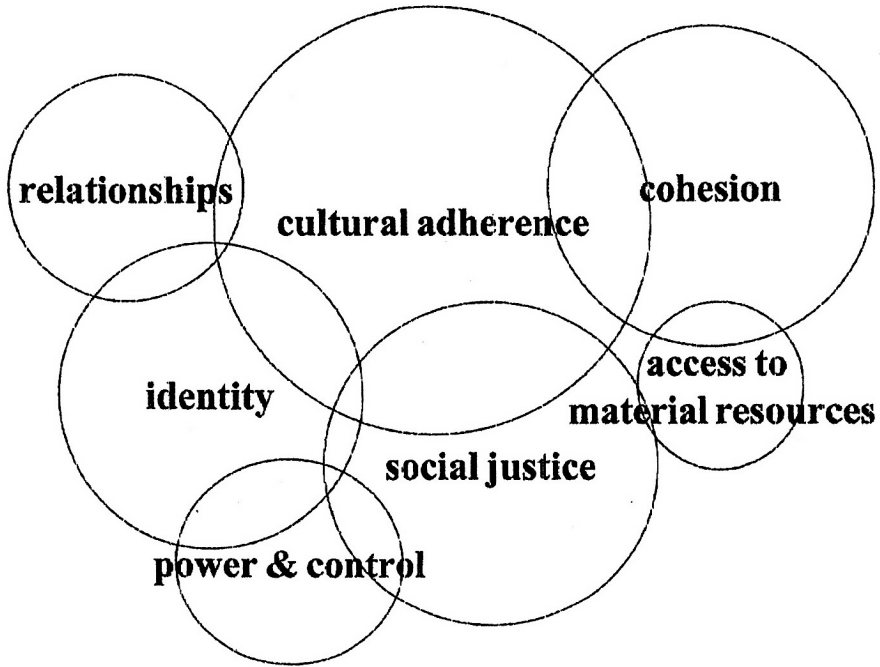
Analysis of Saleem’s narrative and that of other Palestinian youth also shows how identity is founded on a *collective* goal that is pursued in support of the liberation of Palestine, becoming part of the political response to the occupation. Specifically, cultural adherence means contributing to the collective fight for a Palestinian state, and a youth’s sense of power and control is manifested through his or her commitment to resisting the Israeli army. As Saleem explained: “My friend and I used to demonstrate and throw stones at the army. We used to do so to release our anger.” Less confrontationally, attending school is also seen as a way that young people can contribute to the future of a Palestinian State.

Contextually and culturally, Saleem shares a collective identity and purpose, drawing great strength from his association with others around him who share a common life philosophy, or sense of cohesion, which he expresses as: “to see Palestine liberated, to live in peace, to have our rights back . . . I don’t think only of myself but of people as well.” Cohesion is therefore expressed through Saleem’s taking responsibility for himself and others in his family and community in a context where deaths of loved ones are faced regularly. Not surprisingly, Saleem showed clear adherence to his culture, and to the expectations and customs prescribed for boys growing up in Palestine.

Figure 1 depicts the interrelationships between and among the seven tensions that contribute to Saleem’s experience of himself as resilient. The relative size of the circles indicates the amount of influence each of the seven tensions plays in Saleem’s account of his life.

We could equally examine the experiences of Israeli youth on the other side of this same conflict. While beyond the scope of this paper to account for experiences of both Palestinian and Israeli youth, detailed analysis would show the unique constellation of factors influencing how young people and their communities resolve all seven tensions. Israeli youth, of course, like youth in Palestine, have just as complicated, but qualitatively different patterns to how they approach the

Figure One: A case study of Saleem (14 year old boy, Palestine)



social injustices, danger and relationships they experience. Therefore, as illustrated through Saleem's narrative, the pathways to resilience that youth navigate depend upon the social locations in which culture-based negotiations and contextually specific constructions of health take place. Developmental challenges, such as whether a young person stays in school, involve the simultaneous convergence of the seven tensions detailed above and the very real imposition of the social constraints that children face. For example, while youth in the sample all valued education, it is their families' attitudes and beliefs (notably different attitudes toward the education of boys and girls), and provision of instrumental and emotional support, as well as more broadly youth's experiences of social justice and accessibility to educational resources, that mediate the type of schooling pursued and the length of time a youth remains engaged. Family values, after all, reflect com-

munity-wide orientations toward planning for the future and economic hopefulness, as well as gender bias. Even this, though, is not nearly enough to deconstruct an individual youth's decision to stay in school. Whether a young person perceives staying in school as a way of expressing power and control, a way of addressing social justice, is seen as congruent with local cultural values, or is supported financially by parents (Can they afford it? Has the government made public education accessible?), will all combine to shape a youth's experience. One could easily imagine two children from the *same* culture navigating these tensions quite differently. The choice to stay in school, therefore, is not in and of itself an outcome that necessarily has to be associated with resilience. Instead, the resilient child is the one who resolves the seven tensions in culturally relevant ways to thrive.

Implications

These findings have implications for interventions with at-risk youth populations across cultures and contexts. As hypothesized, there are both global and culturally or contextually specific aspects to resilience. Specific characteristics and processes at-risk youth employ to survive reflect the culture and context in which they live. Though we identify seven "tensions" that are common to the entire sample, we note that the resolution of each, in combination, shows uniqueness across individuals. An appreciation for the complexity of each youth's life was shown to be essential to understand their behaviour.

Those intervening with youth exposed to multiple risks need to examine the individuality of a youth's pathway to resistance, investigating and then addressing all seven aspects as detailed here. For example, stay-in-school programs in western countries will likely be most successful if the programs reflect the values of students in their culture and key relationships, fits the way they seek identity and cohesion, and cohere with experiences and needs for power and control (see Cross, 1998; Dei et al., 1997; Gosin, Dustman, Drapeau, & Harthun, 2003).

Limitations

Three specific limitations are noteworthy in this study. The first and most pronounced is a western bias in the data. Reviewing the transcripts, there is an emphasis on the use of the pronoun "I" in the narratives. There is also a high reliance on personal coping and problem-solving skills as the means by which success is achieved. As researchers, we believe this is an artifact of the methods used for data collection. Observation and discussions with local Advisory Committee members has suggested that many of the cultures involved are far

more collectivist than are portrayed in the individual interviews examined. Although a variety of tools for qualitative inquiry were packaged and provided across all international sites, there was heavy reliance on the one-on-one interview method. This method may evoke self-reflective responses and diminish accounts of the influence of family, community, and culture in detailing one's life story. Had there been more use of focus groups, visual methods, and collective story-telling, the data might reveal a broader conception of how resilience is negotiated collectively.

Second, despite efforts to be inclusive, barriers to communication such as the time it takes for mail to reach some sites, poor internet connections, heavy workload and data collection delays, all meant that the dialogical aspects of the data collection and analysis were not as thorough as the team had hoped. The team did, however, meet face-to-face on two occasions, numerous site visits were done by researchers between sites, and all members of the team and LACs had an opportunity to comment on aspects of the findings. At the same time, for example, Saleem, whose life story is included above, did not have an opportunity to comment on the interpretation of his narrative. These limitations are addressed elsewhere by the authors (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005).

Finally, this work does not examine the shift in how tensions are managed over time. As a result, the data run the risk of contributing to the western conception that resilience is something achieved, once and for all, impervious to shifting contexts and influences. The data from this study suggest that resilience is a dynamic convergence of these seven tensions, and the team recognizes that the analysis presented here is a snapshot that carries an illusion of permanence, when impermanence more closely approximates reality. Though the perspectives of adults have helped to introduce a temporal dimension to our analysis, future work will need to examine how narratives change as shifts in contexts occur.

CONCLUSION

The process of multi-site interpretive analysis employed in this study sought to reveal the nature of the interplay among culture, context, and the individual. We have shown how culture provides meaning to a person living through adversity. We have also demonstrated that the impact of risk factors such as war and violence on young people's opportunities for survival depends on the culture and context in which these risks are experienced.

Outcomes associated with resilience, and the processes which mitigate risk and contribute to well-being, are therefore dependent upon individual, relational, community, cultural, and contextual factors. These factors themselves contribute to perceptions of what is and is not healthy functioning among a particular at-risk population. Results from this exploratory study have implications for the design of interventions to promote resilience for vulnerable populations. A more culturally and contextually sensitive approach to health promotion and treatment is indicated. Cultural pluralism in research design, as modeled by the present study, permits a broader view of how children navigate their way around risk. Far from monolithic, each culture provides a heterogeneous worldview with tensions between and among competing definitions of what makes a child healthy.

Rather than seeking homogeneity in conceptions of resilience and its manifestations, this study has demonstrated seven tensions in youths' lives globally that are evidence of the collage of different behaviors, oppressions, constraints, choices, options, and resources that manifest as resilience. Heterogeneity exists in respect to the unique and cultural-embedded pathways children navigate to health in the face of adversity. By proposing these seven tensions and acknowledging the multiple ways they can in combination be resolved, we have resisted imposing solely western understandings of resilience on non-western populations and minorities in western countries. And yet, the commonality of these seven tensions across settings, and their reflection in most cases of aspects of resilience typically discussed in western scientific discourse, attests to the broader tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity across populations in health studies (Smith, 1999). Here we have proposed just one possible model to understand resilience across the contexts in which we have worked.

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