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ARTICLE

Cultural values, coping, and hope in Yup'ik communities facing rapid cultural change

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Abstract

Historical trauma and rapid cultural change contribute to a high burden of stress in Alaska Native communities. The goal of the Yup'ik Experiences of Stress and Coping Project was to better understand stress and coping in Yup'ik communities and the role of cultural values and practices in coping. Sixty Yup'ik adults aged 18–84 years took part in semistructured interviews. They discussed how they coped with salient stressful experiences and shared the things that brought them hope and peace. Interview themes were identified and inter-relationships between themes were explored through social network analysis. Participants discussed the importance of cultural traditions in coping, including subsistence, dancing and drumming, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and reflective awareness of interconnections with others. Participants found strength in family relationships, spirituality, helping others, and coming together as a community. Three coping clusters emerged: *Ilaliurucaraq* (be welcoming) involved opening one's frame of mind and building connections; *Yuuyaraq* (Yup'ik way of life) focused on Yup'ik traditions and values; and *Assircaarturluni Yuuyaraq* (try to live a better life) involved healing from historical trauma. Findings illustrate the resilience and evolving strengths of rural Yup'ik communities facing a continually changing cultural landscape and provide information for developing community-driven culturally based interventions.

Yup'ik people are taking back their values, how they grow up and what was taken away from them, they are taking them again.... That's a big hope and the way we used to pray Western people had said it's the wrong way the way we pray. We're getting that back.

This quote is from the interview with an Elder woman who discussed stress and coping in her Yup'ik community in Southwest Alaska. Her account illustrates experiences of historical trauma and resilience in populations that

have faced colonialist oppression. It also demonstrates the role of the community in the transformation of trauma to strength, and the importance of cultural values in this transformation.

Yup'ik populations have experienced the historical trauma of colonization, including forced separation of children in boarding schools that ruptured transmission of cultural values and identity (Rivkin et al., 2017; Wolsko, Lardon, Hopkins, & Ruppert, 2006). Such experiences contribute to health disparities, including substance abuse, suicide, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011; Gone & Trimble, 2012; Manson, Beals, Klein, & Croy, 2005). However, Yup'ik communities demonstrate unique strengths that can be harnessed to reduce such health disparities. For example, family and community supports and peer influences can be protective against alcohol abuse and facilitate reflective awareness about the consequences of alcohol use among Yup'ik youth (Allen et al., 2014; Mohatt et al., 2004). Traditional values including connection to nature and community are also important resources for coping with the stress of cultural change in rural Yup'ik communities in Alaska (Wolsko et al., 2006). Further, family connectedness and communal mastery (beliefs one can overcome challenges with the help of others) can protect against suicide and distress among American Indians and Alaska Natives (Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland, & Blum, 1999; Hobfall, Jackson, Hobfall, Pierce, & Young, 2007).

Such strengths play a key role in narratives of trauma and resilience. Local community narratives or collective representations of historical trauma and their links to current experiences have important implications for community health and well-being (Mohatt, Thompson, Thai, & Tebes, 2014). Community narratives that emphasize persistence, hope and survival in the face of loss can promote resilience, community transformation, and cultural revitalization (Mohatt et al., 2014; Wexler, Difluvio, & Burke, 2009). Such narratives can facilitate a strong cultural identity, resulting in greater psychological well-being (Taylor & Usborne, 2010).

Cultural identity is particularly important for well-being among adolescents and young adults who are experiencing contact with other cultures (Smith & Silva, 2010). Cultural identity is especially critical in Yup'ik communities, which have experienced significant cultural shifts, including changes in economy, subsistence activities, diet, and relationships between generations. Generational gaps resulting from such cultural change disrupt transmission of cultural traditions important to identity and sense of purpose, creating greater vulnerability to stress (Dinges & Duong-Tran, 1993). Stress has changed across years and generations, and the stressors experienced in Yup'ik communities are quite different from those experienced in the past (Rivkin et al., 2017).

Their youth also face stressors different than those in dominant society (Ayunerak, Alstrom, Moses, Charlie, & Rasmus, 2014). Yup'ik people find themselves having to walk between two worlds, the Yup'ik world and the Western world (Kawagley, 2006). They face both financial and identity struggles associated with navigating a cash-based economy in places with limited job opportunities, where the ability to practice traditional subsistence activities is affected by access to resources and state and federal regulations (Rivkin et al., 2017). The disruption of cultural roles that had traditionally provided meaning, combined with limitations in adult education and employment opportunities in the communities, leaves many young Yup'ik people feeling lost.

Intervention strategies that draw on central cultural values and practices can help address the impacts of such disruptions. Culture fuels positive emotions, including hope, and is an important resource for mental and physical health (Cross, 2003). Building understanding of culturally based resources and their value for well-being in rural indigenous communities is helpful for developing culturally-resonant strength-based interventions. Well-being has culturally distinct foundations and meanings, even for elements with seemingly universal processes (Allen, Rivkin, & Lopez, 2014). These contextually bound meanings are critical to integrate in intervention planning, facilitating the infusion of culture in deeper intervention structures (Allen, Mohatt, Beehler, & Rowe, 2014). Examining local resources and nuances in coping can also help broaden conceptions of resilience (Ungar, 2011).

Strategies to promote resilience can be enriched by understanding the sources of hope in Alaska Native communities. Hope predicts greater life satisfaction, persistence in the face of challenges, flexibility in coping, and positive affect, particularly in times of transition (Ciarrochi, Parker, Kashdan, Heaven, & Barkus, 2015; Snyder, 2002; Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006). Hope is also related to better problem solving and reduced suicidal ideation among Native Americans (O'Keefe, Tucker, Wingate, & Rasmussen, 2011; Yetter & Foutch, 2014). For Alaska Natives hope can be facilitated by connections to cultural traditions (Wexler, Joule, Garoutte, Mazziotti, & Hopper, 2014).

Rural Yup'ik communities facing cultural transition in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Region of Southwest Alaska have voiced concern about stressful events, cultural gaps between the generations, and the impact this has on health (Rivkin et al., 2017; Wolsko et al., 2006). The Yup'ik Experiences of Stress and Coping Project was designed in collaboration with Yup'ik communities, in response to their concerns about stress. Its goals were to better understand stress and coping in Yup'ik communities and the role of cultural values and practices in coping, to inform culturally based interventions. The project explored how participants coped with important stressors in their lives, where they found hope, strength, and peace, and their understanding of the roles of culture and community in coping. It aimed to build knowledge of culturally based strategies, values, resources, and protective factors that facilitate adaptation to rapid cultural change and that could be used in community-driven interventions to promote wellness in rural Alaska Native communities.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Setting

The Yup'ik Experiences of Stress and Coping Project was part of a long-standing partnership between the Center for Alaska Native Health Research at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, two rural Yup'ik communities in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region in Southwest Alaska, and the tribally owned Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, which represents and administers healthcare to the communities in this region.

Yup'ik communities are extremely remote and susceptible to extreme weather conditions. Situated along waterways and off the road system, most Yup'ik communities are accessible from larger hubs solely by small planes, four wheelers, snow machines in the winter, or boats in the summer (Wolsko et al., 2006). Geographic isolation contributes to challenges in access to services and resources such as mental health care and employment opportunities (Allen et al., 2006; Mohatt, Hazel, & Mohatt, 2001). Food and fuel costs further contribute to economic difficulties. Yup'ik cultural traditions remain vitally important, and many Yup'ik people continue to engage in subsistence activities for sustenance as well as a connection to cultural values and traditions (Fienup-Riordan, 2000, 2005).

2.2 | Partnership

A community based participatory research (CBPR) model guided the community-academic collaboration between Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR) and the two Yup'ik communities (Rivkin et al., 2011). Tribal councils in each of the two communities expressed interest in the collaboration. A steering committee in each of these communities was also created and engaged, which included members of the tribal council, leaders, and other community members from a variety of backgrounds, age groups, and community structures, which included the school, clinic, tribal office, and church. CANHR's previous collaborations with Yup'ik communities and history of culturally grounded respectful research helped provide a foundation for the collaborations in the current project (Boyer et al., 2005).

Adhering to CBPR principles, community priorities and feedback guided the research questions; community focus groups and steering committee discussions facilitated developing culturally appropriate sampling, recruitment, and interview protocols; and forums enabled community members to cointerpret and contextualize project findings. Additional information regarding the community partnership, recruitment, interview, cointerpretation and dissemination protocols can be found in prior publications based on the study (Rivkin et al., 2011, 2013, 2017). The study protocols were approved by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Institutional Review Board and by the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation Human Subjects Committee.

2.3 | Participants

Participants were 60 Yup'ik adults (30 men and 30 women). They ranged in age from 20 to 84 years (mean [M] = 45, standard deviation [SD] = 18). A majority reported that they spoke both English and Yup'ik (88%) and followed both the

Western/American and traditional Yup'ik ways of life (97%). Of the participants, 42% reported Yup'ik to be the primary language spoken in the home. A majority had full-time, part-time, or occasional employment (62%), whereas others were unemployed or lived a subsistence lifestyle. Finances were modest, with 30% of participants reporting household incomes less than \$15,000, and 35% reporting household incomes between \$15,000 and \$35,000. Participants had an average of three to four children ($SD = 2.8$), and the average household size was six people ($SD = 2.7$), with some living in multigenerational families. Nearly half of participants (48%) reported being married and another 22% reported they lived with a romantic partner.

2.4 | Procedures and measures

Participants provided demographic information and then took part in semistructured interviews, during which they discussed stressful situations that affected themselves, their loved ones, and the community as a whole. They also described how they coped with these experiences and shared the things that brought them hope and peace. The interview included questions based on an existing Lifetime Events and Trauma interview protocol that was developed to assess stress in American Indian populations (Manson et al., 2005). Focus groups and discussions with steering committees in each participating community helped adapt the interview content, wording, and protocol to ensure it would be relevant for partnering Yup'ik communities (Rivkin et al., 2011). Questions on coping and sources of strength were also added to the interview.

Interviews began with questions about participants' understanding of stress and coping. Participants then responded to closed-ended questions organized into six major categories of stressors: childhood, lifetime, and recent life events, ongoing problems, community stressors, and traumas. At the end of each of these six interview sections, participants were asked to describe a particularly important stressful experience they wanted to share and to discuss how the experience affected them (a prior report discussed the stressors experienced [Rivkin et al., 2017]). Participants then described how they tried to deal with the stressful situation and shared advice they would give to people going through a similar situation. At the end of the interview, participants were invited to share the things that brought them hope and to describe a situation or time when they felt they were at peace. This current study focuses on the coping strategies, and sources of strength, hope, and peace shared during participants' interviews.

2.5 | Analyses

Audio recordings of the interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim. Interviews that were conducted in the Yup'ik language ($n = 11$, 18%) were translated into English during transcription by CANHR's culture and linguistic professional, who also conducted some of these interviews. Qualitative analysis was conducted using Atlas-TI (version 6). Coping themes were derived from the six open-ended interview sections (corresponding to the six different categories of stress), during which participants discussed how they dealt with stressful experiences and advice they would share. Hope themes were derived from the section at the end of the interview, during which they discussed where they found hope and peace. Specifically, analysis involved conducting constant comparison across interview sections and participants to identify, name, and operationalize key themes towards developing a team-based codebook (MacQueen, McLellan, & Milstein, 1998).

Analyses then assessed cross-theme relationships (Charmez, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990) using co-occurrence matrices, representing the connections between multiple themes coded within the same quotations. Inter-rater reliability between the main coder and an auditor was tested on 15% of interviews and averaged 68% (range = 60% to 79% across interviews). All discrepancies were discussed to consensus by the coding team (the main coder, a second coder, and an auditor). Inter-relationships between themes were further explored and visualized using social network analysis methodologies by importing the co-occurrence matrix into ORA-NetScenes network analysis software. Chi-square analyses were conducted to examine gender and age differences (between young adults aged 18–30 years, middle-aged adults 31–50 years, and older adults aged 51–84 years) in coping.

TABLE 1 Coping strategies and sources of hope discussed by at least 20% of participants

Coping strategy	Discussed in coping n(%)	Discussed as source of hope n(%) (N = 60)
Spirituality	34 (57%)	21 (35%)
Kids and parenting	37 (62%)	19 (32%)
Family	42 (70%)	16 (27%)
Culture	29 (48%)	13 (22%)
Be positive	21 (35%)	12 (20%)
Talking to others	50 (83%)	11 (18%)
Helping others	35 (58%)	8 (13%)
Be alone	12 (20%)	7 (12%)
Get/have support	39 (65%)	6 (10%)
Nature	7 (12%)	6 (10%)
Subsistence	14 (23%)	5 (8%)
Be strong	21 (35%)	4 (7%)
Learning from past	19 (32%)	3 (5%)
Let it out	26 (43%)	2 (3%)
Avoid alcohol/drugs	25 (42%)	2 (3%)
Elders	23 (38%)	2 (3%)
Counseling	22 (37%)	1 (2%)
Let it go	21 (35%)	2 (3%)
Stay busy	20 (33%)	1 (2%)
Acceptance	15 (25%)	2 (3%)
Leave the situation	15 (25%)	1 (2%)
Role models	14 (23%)	2 (3%)
Personal growth	14 (23%)	1 (2%)
Alcohol or drugs	14 (23%)	0
Avoidance	13 (21%)	0
Avoid more trouble	12 (20%)	1 (2%)
Community coping	12 (20%)	2 (3%)
Education or training	12 (20%)	1 (2%)

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Coping and hope

Participants discussed how they coped with the various stressors that they, their family, and their community experienced. They also described where they found hope and peace. Table 1 presents the most commonly reported themes endorsed in participants' stories of coping and hope.

Many participants discussed the importance of their *cultural traditions* in coping and hope. *Subsistence* activities, such as hunting, fishing, and berry picking, were described as providing a connection to nature and cultural traditions and a sense of purpose in contributing to their family and community. For example, an older Yup'ik man shared:

It enabled me to be able to live around here, you know? To a point where I could go anywhere and hunt the type of animals or fish that I want to around here.... It left me with a sense of accomplishment in the knowledge that I could take care of myself. Just like graduating from school, which it really was.

Participants also found peace by connecting with *nature* during subsistence activities. A young Yup'ik man described such a peaceful experience:

It was really calm, hardly any wind, and you could see the clouds just barely covering the moon, and the clouds were just clearing.... Just when the sun went down and it got dark, the clouds just cleared up, it was really clear, and the moon was just bright. You could see the reflection on the water and you could see the waves shining from that moon. It was so peaceful. And I caught more than what I usually catch.

Yup'ik dancing and drumming was also described as a significant part of community life that facilitated stress reduction. As one man noted "I think one of the most important things that we have as a people is our dances." Other vital cultural practices included traditional parenting and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Participants talked about the importance of youth learning from Elders about Yup'ik values and ways of life. This passing of cultural knowledge and traditions across generations was discussed as helping young people understand their place in the world and building a connection to identity. An Elder noted:

Up to the time when I was growing up here, before I went to the boarding schools, it still was that way. The Elders were still talking to and teaching the young people, the young boys in the qasgiq ["men's house" or community house] and the young girls either at home by the old ladies or their mothers, about how to be a man or a woman and how to raise children and how to live in the community and the animals here.... And they were taught not only about how to make a basket or how to make a trap or a net or make different types of clothing, boots or gloves or whatever, but it was teaching them how to live, how to be parents, how to take care of children.

The qasgiq was traditionally a spiritual center in Yup'ik communities, where the men lived, where the community gathered for ceremonies, and where children learned from Elders about Yup'ik values and lessons for life (Ayunerak et al., 2014; Rasmus, Charles, & Mohatt, 2014).

Participants also highlighted the importance of paying attention to their relationships with others, and reflecting on how their own well-being and personal actions can affect their family and community. For example, a middle-aged woman shared:

We have to come to awareness first and we have to realize what's going on, what we are doing, what is it that's hurting us, and we need to take care of those things in ourselves first so that we can help our people, our children and God.

These quotes relate to the Yup'ik concept of *Ellangeq*, a mindful awareness of interconnections with others and the consequences of one's actions (Allen et al., 2014). Such awareness was an important Yup'ik value taught in the *qasgiq* (Ayunerak et al., 2014).

Participants also discussed turning to *family* for strength and support and finding hope through their families. Specifically, participants discussed the importance of family for coping, spending time with family, and valuing and using lessons learned from family members in coping. For example, a middle-aged woman shared "My family, support from my family, respect was a big thing towards my dad. Without that, I don't think I'd even be here, if I didn't respect my dad things would have been different." Similarly, an older man shared:

I always feel that the most important part of any experience is the family, being close. Because by being close, you talk with family members, and you can get a lot more ideas and thoughts about what you can do or shouldn't do.

Participants also described finding strength, hope, and joy in both being with and being there for their *kids* and grandkids, sharing activities with them, and being responsible for them. A young woman shared how she enjoyed time with her daughter: "To ease my stress, I listen to music, and dance with my daughter. So, it releases stress with me, and it also give time with my daughter too." A middle-aged woman shared, "Just talk to your kids. Be serious, be truthful ... they're my kids, I don't want them to go through what I went through. So, I talk to them."

People talked about the value of *turning to Elders*, including seeking Elders' wisdom, guidance, and teachings about traditional ways of life, language, and identity. For example, a young woman shared: "I appreciate our Native culture

more. Our subsistence way of life more than I did before. And I'm so thankful that our Elders are here to teach us on how to take care of ourselves." An Elder man shared about Elders' active roles in the community:

Now that we have Elder council ... when we meet like that we'd pretend it was taking place in a qasgiq, in a circle. We would put a foil on the ceiling [to reflect light and look like the open skylight of a qasgiq] and take turns talking starting from our eldest.... We talk about critical things, on how to make them better.

Participants further shared how *spirituality* and religion helped them cope and find hope and peace. This included turning to God, going to church, praying, and connecting with nature. Many described how their faith in God lifted their spirits and helped them be strong. For example, an older man shared how he found peace in his religion and spiritual connection with the outdoors:

Going to church. Saying my prayers. Or when I'm out in the wilderness by myself. Nobody around. It's peace and quiet. Make you think and be close to God. Or to our maker. You know we have a name for God in our language ... Ellam Yua, the Great Spirit. That's who we believe in.

This quote relates with the Yup'ik understanding of *Ellam Yua*, "the spirit of the universe who is everywhere" (Ayunerak et al., 2014, p. 93), which they see as being ever-present and aware, connecting and providing for the people and animals who themselves are filled with spirit.

Participants also discussed how *helping others* brought them hope, such as being there for their friends when they were going through hard times, and serving their community. They described how facing difficult times and *learning from past experiences* gave them the strength and understanding to help others. For example, a young woman shared:

Just tell them the things that I went through and what I'm doing about it now. It not only helps them, it helps myself too, to talk about it. So, it's like easier for me to talk about things that I would never have imagined telling about. So, it's like, instead of dwelling on it, being guilty and shameful about it, it's more of a learning experience.

A middle-aged man shared how his Yup'ik ways enabled him to help others:

And I found out, even though I'm having this kind of hard time, people still need my help, and I have practically nothing. I mean, Western civilization-wise, I don't have anything to give them from there. But on my Yup'ik side, I've got a lot to give, you know. I do my subsistence hunting and I catch more than I need and I give to the people that really need it.

Participants highlighted the importance of coming together as a *community* to support each other, share knowledge, build connections across generations, and transmit cultural values to build a sense of purpose and identity. For example, an Elder woman shared:

People here start communicating with each other and working with each other and having games together, or teaching together the whole group of young children. That has been a lot of help, lots and lots of help. The families who didn't communicate together among themselves they start communicating and doing things together.

Participants also discussed the importance *remaining positive*, and saw it as a source of hope. Examples include thinking positively, turning the negative into the positive, finding something positive to do, or practicing being positive. This coping strategy connects with traditional Yup'ik worldviews: As noted by Kawagley (2006): "The Yup'ik people had to maintain a positive mental attitude to make a living and a life in an unpredictable environment" (p. 31). For example, a middle-aged man participating in our study shared:

When I fall back on the Yup'ik side, I feel like I'm worth something. And it made me look at other people more. How do they deal with everything? Stresses. How did this old man live so long? How did this old woman live so long? I mean, I started asking questions to the old people before they passed away, and some of them gave me pretty good answers. They're basically all the same. Accept the way you live, be happy, carry on. Help people. Smile.

Participants also discussed coping with stress by *talking with others*, such as friends, family, and other community members, including discussing the issue with the person who was the source of stress. They also found hope through talking with others. One young woman said:

Talk about it. The only way that I was able to live through it was talking about it, being open about it. Finding resources out there, you know. There is someone out there who went through the same thing that you went through. And they're living, standing, alive.

Relatedly, participants also discussed the importance of *getting support*, reaching out for help, asking for advice, and knowing that they are not alone if they need help. A middle-aged man noted: "You've got to open up and look around. Find help." Participants also talked about coping by *letting their emotions out*. For example, a young woman noted: "Crying is your strength. Crying takes out your hurt and your pain, and it replaces it with strength." They also talked about *going to counseling*, seeking formal social support through professional or paraprofessional mental health or substance abuse counseling. A young woman shared: "It was really helpful to be seeing behavioral health because that was another way of me being able to talk to someone about everything that I was going through."

Participants talked about *letting go* of past stressors or painful experiences so they could move on, and choosing to move forward and deal with the present rather than remain focused in the past. A young man said: "Today's a new day, new day, new day. Yesterday's done. It's history, it's archives. You can't change it. You can only learn from it." Relatedly, participants talked about *being strong*, having a strong sense of who you are and what you need, or not giving up as a way of coping, as stated by a middle-aged woman: "I had to be the strong one to keep everyone else intact." Being strong also included being assertive and standing up for yourself or your values, as she noted, "It's okay to not have to do something because it's expected of you."

Avoiding drug or alcohol use was also described as being important to coping and to prevent things from getting worse. As one mother noted: "When I quit drinking ... peace went through me knowing that I could raise my children the way I wanted to." Participants also talked about *staying busy*, engaging in work, chores, hobbies, or other activities to deal with stress. As one middle-aged woman noted: "Work off your stress.... I like working. That's what I was taught when I was growing up and I learned a lot from my mom. That hard work is good for us."

3.1.1 | Gender and age differences in coping and sources of hope

Gender and age differences in coping and sources of hope and peace were examined using chi-square likelihood tests. Women were significantly more likely than men to discuss finding strength through being there for their *kids and parenting* (77% vs 47%), likelihood ratio [LR] (1, $N = 60$) = 5.83, $p = .016$, $\phi_c = .31$, and turning to *family* members for support (83% vs 57%), LR (1, $N = 60$) = 5.22, $p = .022$, $\phi_c = .29$. Women were twice as likely as men to report coping by *being positive* (47% vs 23%), LR (1, $N = 60$) = 3.64, $p = .056$, $\phi_c = .25$, although this difference was marginally significant. Men, conversely, were significantly more likely than women to discuss coping and finding peace through *subsistence* activities (37% vs 10%), LR (1, $N = 60$) = 6.26, $p = .012$, $\phi_c = .32$, and *being alone* (33% vs 7%), LR (1, $N = 60$) = 7.16, $p = .007$, $\phi_c = .33$.

Regarding age differences, young adults were significantly more likely to discuss turning to *family* for support (94% than older adults (50%), LR (2, $N = 60$) = 10.53, $p = .005$, $\phi_c = .40$. Young (77%) and middle-aged adults (74%) were also significantly more likely than older adults (42%) to discuss being there for their *kids and parenting* as a source of strength, LR (2, $N = 60$) = 6.83, $p = .033$, $\phi_c = .34$. Middle-aged adults were significantly more likely to discuss coping through *learning from past experiences* (58%) and *letting go* (63%) than younger (18% and 29%) or older adults (21% and 17%), LR (2, $N = 60$) = 8.65 and 10.46, $p = .013$ and $.005$, $\phi_c = .39$ and $.42$, respectively. They were also significantly more likely to discuss coping through *staying busy* (58%) than older adults (17%), LR (2, $N = 60$) = 8.29, $p = .016$, $\phi_c = .37$. Older (71%) and middle-aged adults (63%) were significantly more likely to discuss coping or finding hope through *spirituality* than young adults (29%), LR (2, $N = 60$) = 7.53, $p = .023$, $\phi_c = .35$.

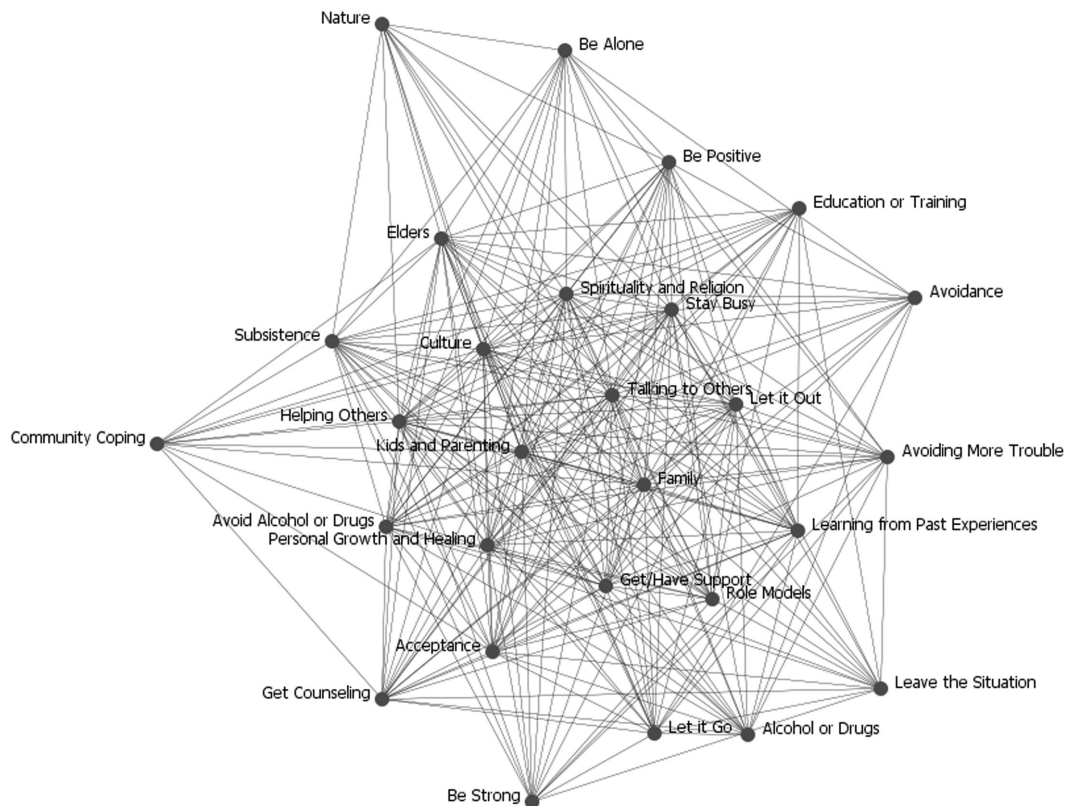


FIGURE 1 Relationships between coping strategies in participant stories

3.2 | Relationships between coping strategies

A symmetrical task-by-task matrix of co-occurrences between the 28 coping themes discussed by at least 20% of participants was imported into ORA-NetScenes social network analysis program, and used to create a network. A two-dimensional network visualization was conducted to examine the inter-relationships between themes. The network density (proportion of possible connections that actually exist within a network) was .75, which is high, indicating the coping themes were highly interconnected.

Figure 1 illustrates the connections between the 28 coping themes. The most highly connected coping strategies are located in the center and the strategies with fewer connections are at the periphery. Notably, no strategy was used independently because all were connected with other strategies. A key entity report was run to examine centrality metrics for the themes (quantifying the importance of a theme within a network). The themes with the greatest total-degree centrality (as measured by number of connections to other themes) were *talking to others* ($C_D = .34$), *family* ($C_D = .22$), *spirituality* ($C_D = .19$), *get/have support* ($C_D = .18$), *helping others* ($C_D = .17$), *culture* ($C_D = .16$), *kids and parenting* ($C_D = .14$), *Elders* ($C_D = .12$), *let it out* ($C_D = .10$), and *stay busy* ($C_D = .07$).

Groupings were examined using the Newman's clustering algorithm for symmetric networks. Three groupings emerged. Group 1 (with a density of 1 and weighted density of .019), which we have termed *Ilaliurucaraq* (be welcoming), consisted of 11 themes (acceptance, family, get counseling, get/have support, helping others, learning from past experiences, let it go, let it out, personal growth and healing, spirituality and religion, and talking to others). Group 2 (density = .71, weighted density = .019), which we have termed *Yuuyaraq* (Yup'ik way of life), consisted of 11 themes (culture, Elders, role models, nature, subsistence, stay busy, education or training, community coping, be positive, be alone, avoidance). Group 3 (density = .87, weighted density = .087), which we have termed *Assircaarturluni Yuuyaraq*

(try to live a better life), consisted of six themes (alcohol or drugs, avoid alcohol or drugs, avoiding more trouble, be strong, kids and parenting, leave the situation).

Figure 2 illustrates the networks for each of these three groupings. All themes within the highly dense *Ilaliurucaraq* group were interconnected. Within this group, themes with the greatest total-degree centrality were *talking to others* ($C_D = .58$), *family* ($C_D = .37$), *get/have support* ($C_D = .34$), *spirituality* ($C_D = .32$), and *helping others* ($C_D = .29$), which were also the five themes that had the greatest centrality within the overall network. Within the *Yuuyaraq* group, themes with the greatest total-degree centrality were *culture* ($C_D = .24$), *Elders* ($C_D = .17$), *subsistence* ($C_D = .09$), *stay busy* ($C_D = .07$), and *community coping* ($C_D = .05$), illustrating that the center of this cluster of coping strategies is highly connected to Yup'ik traditions used in coping. Within the *Assircaarturluni Yuuyaraq* group, themes with the greatest total-degree centrality were *kids and parenting* ($C_D = .24$), *avoid alcohol or drugs* ($C_D = .17$), *be strong* ($C_D = .09$), and *avoid more trouble* ($C_D = .07$), which suggests the center of this cluster is focused on finding strength through remaining sober for one's kids and being a good parent, and avoiding negative influences to stay on a positive path.

4 | DISCUSSION

Findings from this study illustrate the continued resilience and evolving strengths of rural Yup'ik communities facing a continually changing cultural landscape. These strengths, which included family relationships, spirituality, a positive outlook, and orientation toward helping others through their experiences, brought people hope as they faced hard times. Community narratives acknowledged the disruptive effects of historical trauma as well as the critical role of Yup'ik cultural values for community health. The results provide information for developing community-driven, culturally based interventions to address stress, facilitate connection between generations, build sense of purpose, and enhance community well-being.

4.1 | Connections in coping

The interconnections between coping strategies found in the network analyses illustrate that coping strategies are not used independently or in isolation from one another. Rather, they inter-relate and collectively facilitate participants' healing and hope. This finding is consistent with research on the complexity of coping, wherein coping strategies dynamically change as the stressful situation, appraisals, emotions, and other events in individuals' lives evolve and influence each other (Aspinwall, 2004; Lazarus, 1990). It is also consistent with research suggesting the importance of flexibility in coping (Cheng, 2003) and with the fluid and complex nature of the resilience process (Ungar, 2011).

The interconnections between coping strategies resulted in complexity and conceptual overlap that posed challenges for achieving inter-rater reliability. However, they also facilitated an examination of relationships between the myriad coping strategies discussed within overlapping quotations. Social connections were at the core of the network of coping strategies. Such support and connections have been linked with active coping and better physical and emotional adjustment (Aspinwall, 2004; Cohen, 1988; Thoits, 1986).

The most central and densely connected group of coping strategies, representing *Ilaliurucaraq* (be welcoming), includes coping strategies that involve opening one's frame of mind and building connections with others. These findings correspond with Yup'ik understandings of the power of the mind, the value of compassion, the centrality of family, awareness of one's impact and interconnections, and, relatedly, the ever-present *Ellam Yua* (the spirit of the universe) (Fienup-Riordan, 2005; Kawagley, 2006). This inter-connected cluster of coping strategies is also consistent with the "broaden and build" theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), which suggests that positive emotions that broaden our thoughts and perspectives can increase empathy and help people build social resources.

Our findings illustrate the value of Yup'ik culturally-specific manifestations of universal processes that link such positive mindsets with cultivating resources such as social connections. Similar coping strategies (acceptance, spirituality, and growth) assessed through quantitative measures have also been linked with Yup'ik wellness (Lardon, Wolsko, Trickett, Henry, & Hopkins, 2016). Close reciprocal relational bonds involving support, responsibility, and helping others have been identified as important cultural sources of resilience in other Alaska Native populations, including Inupiat

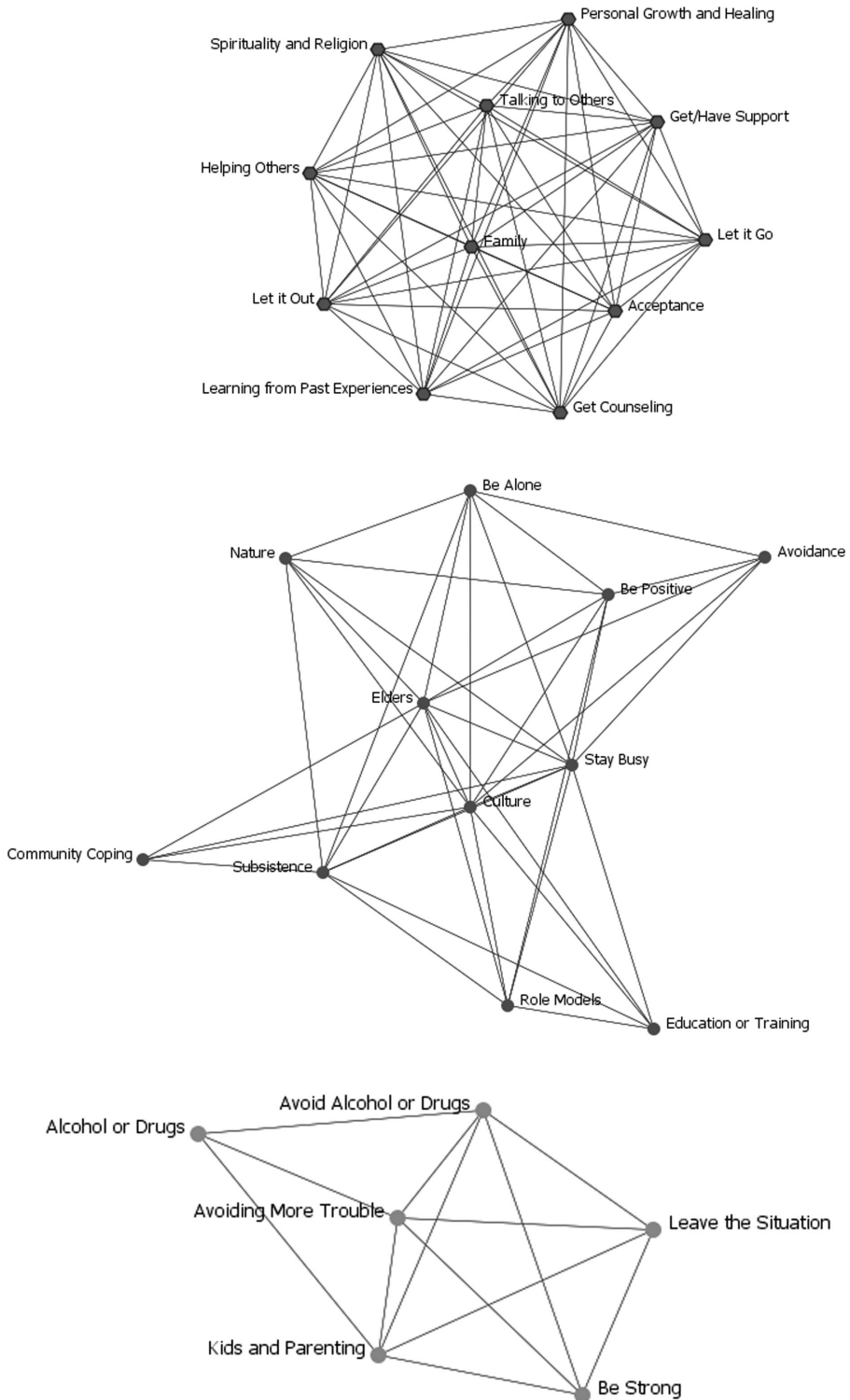


FIGURE 2 Relationships between coping strategies within *Ilaliurucaraq* (be welcoming), *Yuuyaraq* (Yup'ik way of life), and *Assircaarturluni Yuuyaraq* (try to live a better life) groups

youth (Wexler, Moses, & Hopper, 2013) and Alaska Native college students (Sharma, Lopez, Mekiana, Ctibor, & Church, 2013).

The grouping of coping strategies representing *Yuuyaraq* (the Yup'ik way of life) parallels other literature on traditional Yup'ik values and practices that contribute to resilience. These strategies include: respectful subsistence activities; connections with nature including the land, sea, and animals; the community coming together for potlatches; respect for Elders' wisdom and experiences; the importance of role models for young people to learn how to live; the value of staying active and working hard; and the significance of a positive frame of mind in an unpredictable environment (Ayunerak et al., 2014; Fienup-Riordan, 2005; Kawagley, 2006). Such cultural practices are valuable resources for mental health and are important to integrate in strength-based interventions (Cross, 2003).

Finally, the smaller cluster representing *Assircaarturluni Yuuyaraq* (try to live a better life) was connected with healing from the negative consequences associated with cultural change and historical trauma, particularly the destructive impact of alcohol abuse on families. Participants' focus on their children in decisions not to drink illustrates the strength of family connections and the key role of these connections in the turning points in people's lives. Other literature highlights the prominence of family relationships for wellness in American Indian and Alaska Native populations (Walters, Simoni, & Evans-Campbell, 2002). Research examining Alaska Native pathways to sobriety likewise illustrates the significance of family, along with reflective awareness of the relational consequences of one's behaviors (Allen et al., 2014; Allen et al., 2014; Mohatt et al., 2004). These protective factors facilitate a turning point leading to sobriety.

Optimism and positive states of mind help people build resources and cope effectively in times of stress (Aspinwall, 2004; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Study participants found positive meaning in their struggles, such as personal growth and being able to help others through sharing what they learned. Finding such meaning in adversity is associated with better health and emotional well-being (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Aspinwall, 2004; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). The meaning participants found often involved contributing to the well-being of others in their family and community, consistent with the collective and socially embedded nature of well-being in Yup'ik communities (Allen et al., 2014).

4.2 | Generational and gender differences

Some generational and gender differences emerged in particular coping strategies and sources of hope. Older adults were especially likely to discuss spirituality, consistent with prior research on the importance of spirituality for Alaska Native Elders (Lewis & Allen, 2017), as well as with research documenting increases in religiosity over the life span in other populations (Bengtson, Silverstein, Putney, & Harris, 2015). Middle-aged adults were especially likely to discuss a variety of coping strategies, demonstrating versatility and flexibility in coping. Younger adults were especially likely to discuss family as sources of strength.

Women were more likely than men to discuss finding strength in their children and family, whereas men were more likely than women to discuss the importance of subsistence activities, consistent with historically traditional gender roles in Yup'ik societies. Both men and women were involved in subsistence, although in complementary roles. Men traditionally engaged in hunting and fishing. Women took care of and shared the catch with others, whose gratitude was said to create good fortune and facilitate the hunter's future success (Fienup-Riordan, 2005). Women also engaged in berry picking, which was often discussed by participants as a family activity. Gender roles have been changing in Alaska Native communities (Wexler et al., 2014), where women also engage in hunting and fishing and men take care of children. Notably, there are variations in such flexibility of traditional gender roles across time, by region, and between communities within the same region (B. Keyes, personal communication, May 31, 2017).

4.3 | Implications for culturally resonant interventions

In the current study, cultural traditions were deeply integrated into the meaning systems that provided participants hope and a sense of purpose through hard times. Likewise, deep cultural lifeways and thoughtways provide a sense of purpose fostering resilience in Yup'ik youth (Rasmus, Allen, & Ford, 2014), and in other Alaska Native youth, adults,

and Elders (Wexler, 2014; Wexler et al., 2014). Although many cultural traditions have weakened (Wolsko et al., 2006), community consciousness of the need for cultural revitalization has spurred locally directed efforts towards improving well-being utilizing inherent community strengths such as spirituality, connections to family and community, and cultural values (Allen et al., 2014; Fienup-Riordan, 2005; King, Trimble, Morse, & Thomas, 2014). Revitalizing community systems that have served as sources of strength during hard times is critical to facilitating community resilience (Ayunerak et al., 2014).

The project findings illustrate key sources of strength and hope in Yup'ik communities. The findings can inform culturally based interventions that build on existing community structures as well as inter-related coping strategies, values, and relationships. This is especially salient because culturally adapted mental health interventions targeted toward the values and context of a specific cultural group are four times more effective than those that are not culturally targeted (Griner & Smith, 2006). Such interventions are particularly critical in remote communities with limited resources and access to care. Understanding the sources of strength in such communities, including cultural values and traditions, can facilitate developing more effective programs and advance the science of community interventions. Such interventions should recognize the unique cultural context of each community, as well as shared strengths common across many Alaska Native communities that inform a collective cross-contextual understanding (Lopez, Rivkin, & Johnson, 2013).

A key element of the coping networks emerging in this study was the critical role of relationships woven into each cluster, whether they involved active strategies to engage and provide support (*Ilaliurucaraq*), coming together as a community fostering intergenerational connections and mentorship (*Yuuyaraq*), or family relationships and awareness of interconnectedness as motivators for sobriety (*Assircaarturluni Yuuyaraq*). It is critical for programs aimed at fostering wellness to integrate such relational sources of well-being in Alaska Native communities. These programs must be driven and facilitated by local community members (Rasmus et al., 2014), building on their strengths as resources for coping and their relationships with others. This builds community self-determination and sustainability of community interventions. Interventions should integrate family and community activities that incorporate cultural and community strengths, including cultural traditions and values, intergenerational connection, support, communal efficacy, awareness, and a sense of purpose tied to spiritual beliefs and connection and responsibility to family and community.

This study revealed strengths that resonated across generations and genders, as well as some that were especially salient in providing hope, meaning, and sense of purpose for particular subgroups. It is important to be mindful of variations not only across but also within communities and address individual and group differences in the salience of particular strengths (e.g. spirituality, subsistence, children) to ensure resonance and fit for subsets of the community. At the same time, programs should also consider changes across time in flexibility of roles based on age and gender. Efforts to promote resilience should nurture culturally resonant community settings that provide opportunities for community members to use their strengths in diverse ways to contribute to their community and enhance wellness (Ayunerak et al., 2014).

The findings depicted in the various network figures illustrate the deep meaning of connectedness for the community. Although generalization across a broad array of cultures is exceedingly difficult, connectedness describes a salient core value common across Alaska Native value systems (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2006). Connectedness is concerned with how the welfare of the individual is interrelated within one's extended family, community, and surrounding natural world (Mohatt, Fok, Burket, Henry, & Allen, 2011). More broadly, many Native people across North America emphasize how a holistic connectedness with the larger spiritual universe underpins a healthy lifestyle (Noisy Hawk, 2013; Noisy Hawk & Trimble, in press). Indeed, connectedness is one of several common components found among many Native people in their sense of well-being. In their research among samples of Alaska Native youth, for example, Mohatt, Fok, Henry, and Allen (2011) identified four core components of one's awareness of connectedness to include: awareness at the individual level, awareness of one's family, awareness of the community, and awareness of the natural environment. The components are clearly represented in the figures showing the connectedness of each of them.

Given the importance of connectedness, it is important to recognize that "community interventions are complex social processes with properties that constitute more than the sum of their parts. A critical need exists to develop new

ways of building evidence that reflect the complex social systems involved when conducting community interventions” (Trickett et al., 2011, p. 1415). Isolating one element in the array of connected coping patterns at the expense of the influences provided by other elements would be a mistake and thus shortsighted. Focusing exclusively on preventing and treating alcoholism alone, for example, would negate the influences of the other elements that are directly or indirectly connected to it; those elements must be factored into any intervention and approach that takes into consideration the holistic nature of the meaning of connectedness from a Native worldview.

4.4 | Strengths and limitations

There are both strengths and limitations to this study, which parallel those detailed in a prior report of findings from this program of study related to how Yup'ik participants experience stress within the context of rapid cultural change (Rivkin et al., 2017). Specifically, most limitations are inherent to the mixed methods project design wherein a purposive stratified sampling strategy was employed with the goal of gaining diverse and in-depth perspectives (Creswell, 2008). As such, there is a potential for self-selection bias, and caution should be taken when applying findings to other groups or populations.

Study strengths are also many and include the context of study development, implementation, interpretation and dissemination within a community-academic partnership between university researchers and the two Yup'ik communities; specifically the community-specific steering committees that guided research decision-making and data collection activities.

Trustworthiness of study findings was further strengthened by employing a mixed-methods research design that allowed for triangulation in terms of researcher expertise (e.g., Yup'ik language and cultural systems, social and community psychology, public health, quantitative and qualitative methods) and data analysis (Morrow, 2005). Specifically, data analysis was strengthened by using (a) both qualitative and quantitative techniques that included grounded theory to identify, develop, and inter-relate themes related to coping strategies, (b) chi-square likelihood testing to compare coping strategies across age and gender, (c) and an innovative application of social network analysis to achieve a deeper understanding of interconnected coping strategies in Yup'ik communities dealing with rapid cultural change.

4.5 | Conclusion

This collaborative project illustrates the evolving sources of strength and hope that facilitate resilience in Yup'ik communities facing the impact of historical trauma and continuing contemporary stressors. A deeper understanding of the interconnected coping patterns that are embedded in cultural traditions and change can inform ecologically valid community interventions building from local strengths and resources. Such contextually and culturally integrated interventions hold promise for increasing community capacity and reducing health disparities (Trickett et al., 2011).

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