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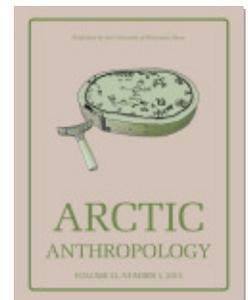
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# Collapsing the Distance: Indigenous-Youth Engagement in a Circumpolar Study of Youth Resilience

Olga Ulturgasheva, Stacy Rasmus, and Phyllis Morrow

*Abstract.* The Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood (CIPA) study brought together researchers from five different universities, working in five different regions of the Arctic, to explore arctic indigenous-youth resilience utilizing collaborative and participatory approaches. This paper focuses on outcomes from the collaboration of two sites in the project and presents findings from a culminating cross-site workshop that engaged indigenous youth and community members, along with university researchers of various disciplines and backgrounds, in a cultural exchange of knowledge and practice. While our main goal for the study was to reveal processes and factors underlying indigenous-youth resilience, we learned much about the processes and factors contributing to resilience in research collaborations as well. Our findings suggest indigenous research methodologies may contribute towards the development of resilient collaborations with potential to bring about transformative outcomes for indigenous-community members engaged in research.

## Introduction

There is a significant need for research methodologies that effectively engage indigenous-community members in the Arctic in a process for understanding how communities and populations are remaining resilient while on the edge of rapid social and environmental changes that increasingly impact at a global level. The Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood (CIPA) study brought together researchers from five different universities, working in five

different regions of the Arctic, to explore arctic indigenous-youth resilience utilizing collaborative and participatory approaches (Ulturgasheva et al. 2011). The project<sup>1</sup> took place over the course of four years and included local and comparative processes as part of the research design. Activities included:

1. Forming local steering committees made up of indigenous youth and community members at each site to participate in and provide oversight for the project;

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*Olga Ulturgasheva, Department of Social Anthropology, 2nd Floor Arthur Lewis Building Room 2.047, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK; olga.ulturgasheva@manchester.ac.uk*

*Stacy Rasmus, Center for Alaska Native Health Research, Institute of Arctic Biology, University of Alaska Fairbanks, PO Box 757000, Fairbanks, AK 99775; smrasmus@alaska.edu*

*Phyllis Morrow, Department of Anthropology (Emerita), University of Alaska, PO Box 757720, Fairbanks, AK 99775; pmorrow@alaska.edu*

2. Developing local and cross-site interview protocols;
3. Recruiting and interviewing 20 youth between the ages of 12 and 18 years at each site;
4. Field trips and fieldwork at each site;
5. Analyzing data, which involved modified grounded-theory coding, developing local and cross-site codebooks;
6. Reviewing results from the data analysis with the local steering committees; and
7. Disseminating results in the communities and through cross-site meetings.

As well, the grant supported opportunities for both academic and nonacademic partners to cross international borders for two large face-to-face meetings. In between, academic researchers communicated with each other and served as links to the communities where they worked. Results from the local and comparative work to identify arctic indigenous-youth stressors and resilience strategies have been published elsewhere (Kral et al. 2014; Nystad et al. 2014; Rasmus et al. 2014; Ulturgasheva 2014; Ulturgasheva et al. 2014; Wexler et al. 2014). For this paper we will focus on outcomes from the collaboration of two sites in the project and present findings from the culminating cross-site workshop that engaged indigenous youth and community members along with university researchers of various disciplines and backgrounds in a cultural exchange of knowledge and practice.

While our main goal for the study was to reveal processes and factors underlying indigenous-youth resilience, we learned much about the processes and factors contributing to resilience in research collaborations as well. Taking as its context an international meeting of academic and community collaborators that capped the four-year project, we specifically examine the practices of research collaboration and community engagement that we believe have led to transformative outcomes for indigenous youth participants in the study and contributed to the making of resilient collaborations.

## Resilience in Collaboration

The most common definition of resilience has come to refer to the ability of an individual or a system to overcome adversity and continue to grow and develop (Ungar 2008). Leaders in the field of social resilience research suggest that resilience can be better understood and operationalized as “both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways” (Ungar 2011:225).

This latter definition is more useful in understanding how to apply the concept to collaborative and participatory research process. Resilient collaborations are not merely those that are able to withstand the tensions, conflicts, and disturbances that can arise in contexts that bring people from vastly different backgrounds and areas together. Rather, resilient collaborations have at their core, individuals with the capacity to navigate to the resources and strategies that will sustain collective well-being in culturally meaningful ways that move the work forward and create opportunities for growth. Resilient collaborations do not simply maintain the status quo; they provide contexts for profound and fundamental change to happen.

Collaboration on its own is a word that is generally spoken with enthusiasm. Ideally, collaboration allows people to combine strengths, yielding results that are more creative and less restricted by the boundaries of individual minds or disciplinary habits than they would otherwise be (Fluehr-Lobban 2008; Graves and Shields 1991; Lassiter 2005). People tend to propose collaborations when they recognize a common goal and have a set of complementary talents that they can potentially apply to achieve it.

This harmonious ideal is often taken for granted in project summaries that detail results, but not processes, of “collaborative research.” In reality, collaborations, like other social relations, require constant tending and are rarely straightforward marches towards mutually embraced ends (see also Dwyer 1987; Field 1999; Konrad 2012; McKendrick 2001; Mullen 2000). In practice, this requires researchers to be mindful of the many social, cultural, and historical factors that shape the attitudes, motivations, and actions of collaborators in a given collaborative context. In this spirit, and of particular relevance for partnerships that include indigenous peoples, Larry Evers and Barre Toelken remind us that

the verb “collaborate” has a special resonance in the context of any Native American community which the second meaning in the following [American Heritage Dictionary] entry captures well: “1. to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort; 2. to cooperate treasonably, as with an enemy occupying one’s country” (Evers and Toelken 2001:1).

In general, for a collaboration to remain resilient then in the wake of differing intellectual and cultural perspectives, as well as unexpected changes in circumstances, researchers are challenged to create and continuously adapt their logistics, conceptual approaches, and interpersonal working conditions in ways that will make continuing and future partnership a welcome option (Laveaux and Christopher 2009; Trimble 2009).

In the case at hand, partners included indigenous youth from a wide variety of arctic communities. The study that initially engaged them brought together researchers and community partners working in the circumpolar north on projects related to youth resilience and wellbeing. The study aimed to examine narratives about growing-up in five communities—Alaskan Inupiat, Alaskan Yup'ik, Canadian Inuit, Siberian Eveny, Norwegian Sami—in order to provide a comparative framework and shared model for understanding indigenous-youth resilience across five sites (Ulturgasheva et al. 2011; Ulturgasheva et al. 2014). As the research process evolved, researchers needed to intentionally create the sorts of settings and activities that would facilitate the open engagement of youth with adults on topics relating to maturation, self-representation, and community problem-solving. Success in such an enterprise involves dexterous weaving; however, it is possible to see, both in the making and the “wearing,” what kinds of threads and patterns produce durable cloth.

This paper focuses on one of the productive relationships that developed uniting youth and adults from two communities and the academic researchers working in them. We examine certain collaborative and participatory practices and processes that emerged and overlapped between the two sites, helping shape the space for potentially transformative outcomes among indigenous youth. Our aim is to provide guidance on how resilient collaboration might be drawn from essentially self-selected subsets of individuals who share important affinities and positionalities (Hopkins 2007). We will present case examples to demonstrate how resilience, as a focus for not only our understandings of youth experience, but of the collaborative experience itself, informs process and contributes to the production of transformative moments in research settings.

As part of the international study, and particularly within the context of the cross-site workshops, we were able to observe the ways that collaborative research was both discussed and practiced at each site. Levels of engagement and standards of practice varied among sites and between researchers and indigenous-community collaborators and youth. Clear connections could be made between the sites led by indigenous researchers who engaged their collaborators both as colleagues and “fellow travelers” sharing similar social status and historical background. Youth were engaged at these sites in a deeply personal way that, as we will discuss in more detail below, potentiated transformative moments where power was taken by the youth rather than given to them by researchers, and whereby youth resilience became not just our subject of research but our outcome as well.

## Transforming Research

For transformation to happen, the research process itself must transform to accommodate diverse backgrounds, learning, and worldviews. Collaborative and participatory approaches in research with indigenous communities have become widely accepted as best practice for researchers seeking to engage and sustain involvement of indigenous-community members in the process (Mohatt et al. 2004; Neilsen and Gould 2007). Despite the attention and broad application that participatory research methodologies have received over the past decade, much of what has been written focuses on methodological principles and ideals rather than actual practice and outcomes (Rasmus 2014). Two participatory approaches have gained particular traction in academia as effective strategies for doing research with indigenous communities. The first, community-based participatory research (CBPR), entails a set of principles that guide a researcher's practice for including community members in the academic research process (Isreal et al. 1998). The second, indigenous research methodologies (IRM), entails strategies that ground the research and researchers within indigenous knowledge, process, and practice (Denzin et al. 2008). Both approaches are collaborative and participatory, but there are important differences that became clear to us as we engaged as part of a larger collaborative team that included both researchers applying mainly principles and practices from a more traditional CBPR perspective and researchers utilizing IRM. For those of us who shared a focus on and preference for strategies falling more within the IRM framework, IRM was an essential component of our resilient collaboration. Specifically, IRM provided 1) a particular critical perspective on the collaborative process, 2) a space for reflexivity and adaptability, and 3) a potential solution to what is termed the “proximity paradox” of CBPR, both in terms of relational and spatial distancing (Richie et al. 2013). We will discuss each of these in more detail below.

## Community-Based Participatory Research

CBPR is now a well-established approach used for achieving community-member engagement in research and collapsing hierarchical boundaries inherent within a classical research process (Minkler and Wallerstein 2008; Wallerstein and Duran 2006). The application of the basic principles of CBPR varies between researchers, but overarching characteristics typically include “collaborative, equitable involvement of all partners in all phases of the research” and the creation of settings that “promote co-learning and empowering processes that attend to social inequalities” (Israel et al.

1998:175). More recently CBPR has emerged as a research standard of practice among social science and health researchers working with indigenous communities and populations (Cummins et al. 2010; Holkup et al. 2004; LaVeaux and Christopher 2009; Noe et al. 2007). This has potential benefits in that researchers are coming into collaborations with indigenous communities more acutely aware of the power differentials and more understanding of the need to spend time building trust and reciprocal relationships with their community partners. At the same time, there are potential drawbacks to a widespread adoption and standardization of CBPR when the acronym is presented as self-evident. In CBPR, “subjects” become “coresearchers” or “partners” in the study, but changing the terms does not change the relationship itself. In fact, identifying indigenous collaborators as “coresearchers” may have the unintended outcome of perpetuating hierarchies. For example, classifying indigenous collaborators as “researchers like us” does not shift the balance of power and position at all. Instead it overlays onto indigenous people relational research standards and practices often foreign or contradictory to their own. The term coresearcher is meant as an equalizer, but why not choose instead to term the researchers doing indigenous CBPR as “co-indigenous”? Creating terminology like coresearchers and using it uncritically creates shortcuts in the CBPR process whereby researchers can seemingly demonstrate an “empowering process that attends to social inequalities” simply by assigning these positions to their indigenous-community collaborators. In this way, CBPR can actually work to perpetuate colonialism, Euroamerican ethnocentrism and paternalism towards indigenous collaborators by requiring everyone to be “equal”—that is, as researchers. This also allows continuity with research-based ethics of conduct that, as we described above, often entail social and behavioral practices, such as professional distancing, which define and limit the types of engagement achieved in CBPR.

### **Developing Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRM)**

The main parameters of IRM revolve around the notion of “relational accountability” (Wilson 2008) according to which knowledge cannot be owned or discovered but may be given a visible form through symmetrical, mutually beneficial exchange of ideas, perspectives and experiences. The past decade has marked considerable advancements in the development of critical and IRM (Denzin et al. 2008; Smith 1999). These studies have produced a set of commonly shared characteristics indicating IRM that are generally based on

qualitative, collaborative, participatory methods and social justice and empowerment frameworks. Advocacy and activism are not seen as opposing forces or indicators of bias in the context of IRM (Kovach 2009). IRM generally require reflexivity and awareness of each person as an instrument in the social scientific process of knowledge production (Kovach 2009; Medicine 2001). Much attention has gone towards providing a theoretical foundation justifying the development of indigenous approaches in research (Denzin et al. 2008). Much less time has been spent applying these approaches to actual research projects undertaken in indigenous-community contexts. There is a perceived need in putting IRM into practice while incorporating multiple perspectives on what constitutes collaborative research. The latter dynamic sheds a new, critical light on the notion of proximity in collaborative research, especially in the light of the more classical emphasis on creating professional distance between a researcher and researched, a distance which may easily merge into hierarchy in the context of the academy (Mihesuah and Wilson 2004). In the following section we review proximity (i.e., professional distance) in order to illustrate how professional distance may hinder some desirable transformative outcomes for youth involved in a study such as this.

### **Professional Proximity in IRM**

Collapsing professional distance is a necessary prerequisite for creation of the space that accommodates and fosters transformative moments among youth, community members and researchers themselves. Here we are focusing on those practices and processes that enabled youth engagement and led to the project’s transformative outcomes. Drawing from our own experiences of engaging youth in producing videos that depicted one day from their lives we explore a connection between techniques of collaboration and transformative moments among youth.

Clearly inherent in the project were many possible permutations of collaboration and distinct personal and disciplinary views on distance or proximity involved in interactions between researchers and community members among the sites. Although all the university researchers formally described their enterprise as CBPR, differences in ground-level approaches became evident in the discussions and presentations from each other’s community projects during the cross-site workshops held in Cambridge, England (Ulturgaheva et al. 2011), and Washington, D.C. (Fig. 1) The character of each individual researcher’s personal engagement with community members also varied. We believe this variation may be related to the researcher’s disciplinary stance regarding



**Figure 1. Group photograph from the Circumpolar Indigenous Pathways to Adulthood (CIPA) workshop in Washington, D.C., 2012. Authors Olga Ulturgasheva (upper row, far right, standing) and Stacey Rasmus (upper row, second from right, standing).**

“professional distance,” which shapes his or her approach to community–researcher relationships.

The American Psychological Association’s Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct contains clear guidelines prohibiting the development of “multiple relationships” where “a psychologist is in a professional role with a person and at the same time is in another role with the same person” (APA 2010:6). These guidelines apply both within clinical and research contexts, and they are often used as standards of practice for those receiving formal training in human health and education fields. This code of conduct presents particular challenges when conducting research in rural indigenous arctic communities. We understand that the need to maintain professional distance remains relevant and essential for conducting research in the context of clinical and psychiatric research where the hierarchical model between a doctor and his or her patient, which maintains “patient–client” boundaries, is necessary for conducting and completing the course of

medical treatment or clinical experiment. However, it is our contention that in order to achieve collaborative relations in community-based research, a closer professional proximity better serves to engage the community and, in our case, the youth in the collaboration.

Maintaining professional distance, by avoiding multiple relationships, can work against fundamental principles of collaborative research by reinstating a hierarchical approach that undermines the more egalitarian terms of community engagement and collaboration desired in community-based and participatory studies. The type of the data produced emerges directly from the type of participation and engagement that evolves over the course of the research project. Such codes of conduct can even prevent the research from achieving results useful both for the communities themselves and for the production of scientific knowledge by inhibiting the development of trusting relationships in research that could impact the quality of the data produced.

## Collapsing the Distance: Indigenous-Youth Engagement in Research

As stated earlier, the parent study involved five teams from five different regions in the circumpolar north collaborating on a macrolevel to identify both shared and divergent stressors and also the strategies for being well and strong that indigenous youth learn as they navigate their way into young adulthood (Ulturgasheva 2012; Ulturgasheva et al. 2014). This discussion takes a microlevel approach to examine the collaboration from our own site-specific perspectives and to show how a deeper collaborative connection emerged between our two sites, the Siberian Eveny (Ulturgasheva 2014) and Alaskan Yup'ik (Rasmus et al. 2014), during the final cross-site workshop.

The common ground from which this collaboration emerged was, first of all, the shared disciplinary stance of the primary investigators for the Siberian Eveny and Alaskan Yup'ik sites. Both are anthropologists by training with indigenous backgrounds, who share a moral orientation to research according to which the idea of distancing oneself from the everyday experiences of the people with whom one studies and their social lives would be entirely inconsistent with the requirements of our academic discipline. It could be argued that any contemporary community-based and participatory methodology can be traced back to anthropology and, specifically, to its participant observation method. Unlike methods utilized within other social-science fields, participant observation essentially requires the development of multiple relationships, with the intentional abandonment of professional distancing, to achieve productive and meaningful relationships that are defined by indigenous-community standards (Dewalt and Dewalt 2011).

Participant observation also demands the researcher engage within the community context in ways that emphasize the importance of decolonizing the research endeavor and collapsing hierarchical boundaries between “us” as researchers and “them” as our subjects (Smith 1999). CBPR shares a similar goal, but when practices that go by that name remain unexamined, there is potential for idealism to go unchecked. It was our shared interest in decolonizing the research endeavor and collapsing hierarchical boundaries that instigated our focus on a common strategy for engaging youth from our sites in a critical, reflexive, and proximal way.

In planning the cross-site workshops, we were mindful that the cross-cultural and international experience of the meeting would be

particularly powerful, especially to the young participants who were all eager to learn and share their experiences. While planning the final cross-site workshop we recruited an external moderator, Phyllis Morrow, to assist with the agenda and help facilitate cross-site discussions. Morrow's work on cross-cultural interactions (Hensel and Morrow 1992; Mather and Morrow 2001; Morrow 1996, 2002, 2003) provided the tools to facilitate collaboration and document the participatory process.

In spring 2009, at the project's first cross-site meeting held at the University of Cambridge, youth and researchers had presented community video and photo portraits (Ulturgasheva 2011). Agreeing that the community portraits had been particularly effective, we discussed how to engage youth in the production of community portraits representing results from the research study of youth resilience in a way that would allow youth articulate their own perspectives and report the findings of the study from their own perspectives, as opposed to having the adults and university researchers present on their behalf.

For this purpose, we decided to involve youth in the production of digital community portraits and an auto-ethnographic film that would portray “living strong” through a “day in my life” in their own respective communities. In two months leading up to the meeting, we traveled to our respective sites to engage community members and youth in this task. The Yup'ik participants, who became involved in the production of the video film and then attended the Washington meetings, included two youths, Travis (age 17) and Freddie (age 20);<sup>2</sup> an adult community member (Freddie's mother); and an elder. The Eveny participants also included two youths, Dunia (age 15) and Spiridon (age 18); an adult community member; and an elder.

These participants were carefully chosen. Alert to community social patterns, we shared an anthropological understanding that, typically, only certain individuals tend to be put forth (locally) and thus chosen (by outsiders) to “represent” the entire community of people. Both of us sought to bring in youth who might not otherwise get an opportunity to “shine” and we thought would do so. Importantly, we included young men, who are typically underrepresented in such projects. An in-depth, personal knowledge of each individual's potential was required to choose participants who could meaningfully engage in the process.

Initially, for example, one local-school staff member recommended that Rasmus invite a young woman who was “very practiced in public presentation.” Instead, Rasmus suggested Travis, whom she had observed in other local-community contexts emerge as a young leader and speaker.

Similarly, Ulturgasheva saw Dunia's potential in spite of some local concern that she was "silent" and—as she "lived in the wild"—might be unprepared for an urban, international experience.

In some situations, including parents and other relatives, might have had a chilling effect on youth expression, preventing them from standing up for themselves. In this context, we saw it as a way to provide structure and support to the youth, foster mutual learning, and reinforce cultural practices. And we understood that it was important to bring the youth's kin, particularly to important events and when traveling, as precaution and protection.

The Eveny documentary entailed preparatory work in two settings: the village and the forest reindeer camp. Ulturgasheva traveled to both locations and worked with youth at each place to produce short films about their everyday lives. Similarly, Rasmus went to the Yup'ik village site to organize and engage youth in producing a documentary about what it means to live "Yup'ik strong" on the land in an Alaska Native village today.

These documentaries formed the core of the community portraits presented at the cross-site meeting in Washington D.C. The Yup'ik youth, Freddie and Travis, presented "Coming in Hot: Yup'ik Strong on the Yukon." The film gave a spirited portrayal of the young people and their community, featuring such activities as boating out on the river, setting a whitefish net, cooking freshly caught fish over a campfire, digging for "mouse foods" on the tundra, and being with family at home in the community. Other youth in the community assisted with filming and taking photographs in the village, and Rasmus worked with them to edit and create the finished video (Hsu Oh 2014a).

Eveny youth presented portraits of both village and forest life. For the former, Ulturgasheva provided Spiridon with a camera to document his everyday life. She also photographed him when Spiridon took her around the village and nearby forest. Together they produced a photo presentation of one day in the life of Eveny village youth. For the latter, Dunia, along with her sisters and Ulturgasheva, documented the everyday experience of living in her family reindeer-herding camp. Ulturgasheva put the video clips together in a way that would allow Dunia's personality, subsistence skills, and knowledge of living on the land to come through vividly (Hsu Oh 2014b). Both video and photo presentations illustrated and were intended to give the audience a sense of the social life of Eveny youth in the village and forest settings.

As a strategy for representing and juxtaposing viewpoints, one of the essential challenges in collaboration of having participants create

and present these individual research products and presentations, served well. Simply allowing related though distinct statements to stand side by side is one simple and essentially respectful way to allow both audience and presenters to experience a diversity of approaches and draw their own inferences and conclusions.

At the same time, some of the most important effects were not necessarily intentional. What happened was that the community portraits served to collapse boundaries between subject and object, researcher and researched. Unlike a normative lecture that conveys generalized information, these presentations became "three-dimensional" (i.e., combining video, audio, and physical presence). Watching themselves on a video depicting their lives, which they themselves created, and watching people watch them on screen, powerfully affected the Yup'ik and Eveny youth. In a shift from the position of being objects of research, those being studied staged a self-representation, itself the product of their research. In other words, three-dimensional engagement was conjured through the youth participation: first, as producers of short ethnographic video films (visual ethnographers); second, as main protagonists (ethnographic subjects); and, finally, as discussants of their own films (cultural interpreters).

Moreover, as the young presenters—Dunia, Spiridon, Travis, and Freddie—saw themselves in others' eyes and, through the audience response to their presentations, found their experience validated. Through this external social validation they became both more empowered as social actors and more reflexive, expressing increased awareness of their own lives and cultural histories. The youth also became closer to each other because they shared in a transformational process that they both experienced within themselves and observed in one another.

In the comparative context that then emerged, the Yup'ik and Eveny youth recognized their multidimensionality as they observed contrasts and commonalities between their situations and those of other northern indigenous youth. Participants from Alaska and Canada, for example, particularly those from communities in which indigenous language and subsistence activities have declined, were quite preoccupied with the issue of ethnic identity: "who we are" today. At one point, Travis commented on how good it was to know that Yup'ik people "aren't alone." He was, he added, "happy to be with people that I can't understand." His happiness referred not just to the indigenous languages that were in evidence but also to his immersion among real, strong, indigenous people, the tangible evidence that indigeneity has not disappeared, and that he has a comparative place in the spectrum. Conversely, the Eveny

herders were less concerned about their identity and much more concerned about social and political marginalization and governmental neglect. While this contrast was not explicitly emphasized, it was apparent that through the community-portrait presentations and discussions the youth began to understand each other's cultural, political, and economic situations and became more acutely aware of their own.

### **Transformative Outcomes of Youth Engagement in Collaborative Research**

We identified several potentially transformative moments that arose out of what we identify as three-dimensional encounters, those in which youth are fully realized as agents of both their own representation and well-being, as well as of the collective collaborative group.

The collaborative strategies engaged within and between the Siberian Eveny and Alaskan Yup'ik sites produced a space for transformation to happen. At such moments, youth publically assumed confidence, took responsibility, exhibited self-awareness, and at times expressed a kind of proud, fierce joy. Although many of the young people in attendance were well along the pathway towards adulthood, the desire to remain a "youth" was also still strong. But in those shimmering, crystalline moments when a clear yearning for and movement towards a more fully realized adult humanity appeared, the collaborative effort peaked and the youth were at their most powerful.

The research synergy that occurred between us as indigenous anthropologists carried over to and was reflected in interactions among the community members from the Siberian Eveny and Alaskan Yup'ik communities respectively. The development of such synergistic collaboration involved several aspects. One aspect involved our mutual agreement to coproduce with the youth from our respective sites, auto-ethnographic films that would portray the young people attending the conference as they are in their homes and communities. This process potentiated a transformative moment for the youth by positioning them as expert and participant within the research and community contexts. The films involved powerful combinations of distinct images and words that connected the youth instantly since they, as film producers, protagonists, and cultural interpreters, became key cultural consultants involved in providing guidance for their peers from other arctic communities. The fact that the main protagonists of the films were present and available for the discussion simultaneously sparked dialogue between the youth and their audience. The films

also served to strengthen collaborative ties and solidarity between the two sites as youth were able to see themselves reflected back in their own and the other sites' representations of a day in a life of an indigenous arctic youth.

Transformational moments then were potentiated through this type of multidimensional engagement, from being able to see all potential sides of an object and subject, producer and produced, interpreter and interpreted. Specifically, transformation gained momentum when youth from each community got engaged in the construction of digital portraits showcasing who they are at home, in the context of their communities, as well as who they are out on the land engaged as hunters, fishermen, and reindeer herders. These same youth were those that traveled to the workshop and presented their representations as they simultaneously presented another dimension of themselves as producers and as workshop participants. Youth video and photo presentations served as a means of visual expression that subtly and vividly revealed their perceptions of the Native land, their families, and subsistence activities, and they served as a strategy to engage them in reflection about themselves and their Native communities.

The next step involved youth watching similar visual presentations produced by young participants from other regions of the Arctic. The intimacy of these representations drew in the other workshop participants and prompted animated discussion and an exchange of questions and answers, in which the youth were makers, stars, and presenters of their lives. In this setting, Dunia no longer seemed the shy and silent girl. Revealed in the video to be an apparently tireless and competent master of tasks, ranging from lassoing reindeer to preparing meals, she earned the others' admiration, as they remarked on Eveny subsistence skills, language vitality, physical energy, and the obvious centrality of cultural values, embedded and expressed in their continuing relationship with reindeer. Siberian adult participants noted how significant this was: one adult participant in the workshop stated, "In Russia, reindeer herding is always depicted negatively. Here, the herders got a kind of validation."

The activity of presenting in front of youth from other countries allowed young participants to experience each other both as objects for external observation and as subjects reflecting on similarities and differences of their experiences. Both activities that were aimed at multidimensional engagement created the space for intersubjectivity and self-reflexivity. The process that involved youth as producers of the films (subjects), main film characters (objects), and reflexive observers (cultural interpreters) served as a prerequisite for transformative outcomes and shaped

productive moments of cross-cultural dialog and understanding.

The three-dimensional engagement of youth appeared to be transformative because in the course of the workshop youth had a unique chance to act as agents responsible for what they produced and presented on the screen and as cultural experts and main consultants who had to share knowledge about the past and present of their communities in a sensible and accountable manner to the youth from other circumpolar communities. The Eveny and Yup'ik youth both demonstrated and observed that such engagement is an important ingredient in transformative process, and all of the youth grew through their active participation and collaboration in the workshop.

The role of the researcher in this type of enterprise is pivotal. Professional proximity defines both researchers and youth as agents, interacting in the same field, a realistic and accessible way of equalizing at least some of the terms of their relationship. Proximity is created largely by interacting with youth participants in nonresearch settings, including their homes and schools. By being a part of their everyday lives, researchers are provided with and seeking access to not only their "knowledge" but also their feelings, hopes, dreams, and personal aspirations. Through these types of engagement, a researcher in a more proximal relationship becomes 1) a facilitator of the collaborative process and multidimensional engagement; 2) someone trusted and relied on by youth; and 3) a mentor and a source of moral support. If we had been limited by a disciplinary need to maintain professional distance, we feel certain that the collaboration with Eveny and Yup'ik youth would have been less personal and therefore afforded fewer opportunities for productive expression. We have found that, as researchers, we and our community collaborators have forged strong ties together and, independent of the project, community members have furthered these relationships through social-network websites. By facilitating contacts during, outside of and after the meetings, including through subsequent visits to each other's sites, we continue to nurture these relationships.

## Conclusion

In sum, building resilient collaboration is an unending and negotiated process that requires a complex attention to proximity, positionality, co-production, coexperience, intersubjectivity, and counterinterpretation. This level of complexity can be neither achieved nor expressed in a "one-off" representational event, such as a community consultation or a public presentation that simply invites

community representation. Academic researchers involved in similar collaborative projects with indigenous youth and their communities should understand that collaboration becomes resilient by not just crossing boundaries but by significantly reducing them. Minimizing boundaries and maintaining relational proximity in research requires systematic and ongoing efforts to maintain authentic relationships with community members. To maintain the proximal relational interactions needed for resilient collaborations, it is important to move beyond one- and two-dimensional representations of collaborative dialogue and outcomes towards three-dimensional presentations and encounters that evidence the community-based and participatory principles in practice and moves the collaboration to deeper levels of engagement. An effective CBPR strategy then moves away from one-dimensional collaboration towards multidimensional engagement, in which distinct points of view and different positions are given expression within a complex field of intersubjectivity.

Our collaboration has contributed to our critical take on the notion of professional distance in CBPR, and specifically how it is important for us to achieve proximity in presence and in person with our indigenous collaborators and youth, as part of the research process. It is important to be aware that CBPR can easily take a slippery path when it serves as an academic shortcut. At worst, it can conceal underneath both patronizing and inherently colonial practices of paternalism towards indigenous research collaborators.

We demonstrated that in order to achieve productive collaboration with transformative results, it is important to collapse the distance between university researchers and indigenous collaborators. Such distance inadvertently maintains institutional hierarchies, as well as epistemological, disciplinary, and paradigmatic boundaries. Collapsing the distance and crossing the boundaries may potentially lead to unexpected, creative, and transformative outcomes. In the process of preparation for the workshop, and during the course of the workshop, it became obvious that active involvement of youth as visual ethnographers, main protagonists, principal cultural interpreters, and consultants helped to transcend boundaries and hierarchies, which are embedded in the dyad of a researcher and researched. Since youth were involved in a deeply personal way as researchers and community members, the entire process of production and participation laid the ground for transformative moments where young people took their power and youth resilience became not just our subject of research but an outcome as well.

## Endnotes

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2. It is with the permission of the youth that we use their real first names in this paper. All four youth were featured in First Alaskans magazine March 2014 and May 2014 issues.

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