# WIDENING THE CIRCLE

**Newsletter of the National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research**

Volume 8, Issue 2 Fall/Winter 2006


*The National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research was developed in December 2001 as a partnership between Aboriginal communities and academic researchers. The NAMHR is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and includes a network of researchers from across Canada with extensive experience in Aboriginal health and related areas.*

*The priority of the Network is to develop research capacity. To that end, the emphasis is on networking and training for existing researchers and conducting a series of pilot projects that provide a basis to seek funding for larger scale projects from other sources including regular CIHR competitions, federal and provincial programs and Aboriginal organizations.*

## NAMHR Annual Meeting 2006: Summary

**Aboriginal Mental Health: Rethinking the Research Agenda**

Shannon Dow, NAMHR Coordinator

The NAMHR 2006 Annual Meeting titled "Aboriginal Mental Health: Rethinking the Research Agenda" was held October 19 & 20 in Montreal, Quebec. The meeting was hosted by Dr. Laurence Kirmayer, and held at the Jewish General Hospital. The meeting consisted of presentations by NAMHR co-investigators, special guests and collaborators, as well as workshops and a film screening.

The theme of this year's Annual Meeting was "rethinking the research agenda" for Aboriginal mental health research. This theme was chosen because the NAMHR is planning a series of new research projects. These projects will be included in the NAMHR's proposal to receive further funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The NAMHR's funding is soon

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coming to an end, and a new CIHR grant would extend the NAMHR for three more years. With the idea of rethinking the research agenda in mind, the Annual Meeting therefore covered a variety of topics, including ecocentric orientations, decolonizing methodologies, healing and resilience.

T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater, Mohawk elder, opened the meeting by welcoming the participants to the territory of the Mohawk people. This was followed by an opening address by Dr. Laurence Kirmayer, James McGill Professor of Psychiatry & Director of the Division of Social & Transcultural Psychiatry at McGill University and Director of the Culture & Mental Health Research Unit at the Jewish General Hospital.

**Ecocentric orientations**

The morning of Day 1 of the meeting started with a discussion of ecocentric orientations. Ecocentrism is a philosophy that recognizes the importance of the environment, and that no single organism is more important than another. Dr. Robin Rodd, Lecturer in Anthropology at James Cook University in Australia in his presentation, *Eco-affective reasoning, ethos and resilience*, discussed how there is currently a gap in our understanding of social, biological and ecological roots of resilience because researchers have not paid enough attention to the importance of indigenous belief systems. He used the example of the Piaroa people of southern Venezuela to talk about indigenous healthcare systems from an ecocentric perspective.

Joseph Gone, Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology and the Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan, also talked about ecocentric orientations. He explained how some people in Fort Belknap Indian reservation in the United States believe that people can have good mental health if they participate in indigenous rituals in sacred places on or near the reservation. Dr. Gone talked about how mental health clinics on the reservation may not be welcome by community members because community members see them as colonial interference on native land. He said that community members may not use these clinics and their health services if they are not welcome by community members.

**Decolonizing methodologies**

The meeting also included a panel discussion on decolonizing research methodologies. This panel discussion asked a variety of questions, including: What are the implications of decolonizing methodologies for researchers working in Aboriginal communities? To what extent have participatory research methodologies influenced policy and programming relating to Aboriginal health? What are the benefits and shortfalls of the principles of ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP), principles that have been adopted by many First Nations organizations?

During this panel discussion, Dr. Ann Macaulay, Sheila Whitebean and Terry Young from the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project (KSDPP) gave an overview of KSDPP and talked about the strong benefits of using community-based research where community members participate in the research process. In addition, Michael Kral, a clinical psychologist and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto, talked about "the indigenization of research." He gave examples of his work in Nunavut and Alaska to talk about why decolonizing methodologies may be important to Aboriginal people.

**Healing**

During the session on healing, T'hohahoken Michael Doxtater, Director of Indigenous Studies in Education Research and Teaching at McGill University, presented the film *Forgotten Warriors: The Story of Canada's Aboriginal War Veterans*. This film shares memories of Canadian Aboriginal veterans of World War II. The film

reveals how they were negatively affected by the Canadian Soldier Veteran's Settlement Act, which was meant to reward veterans for their service. The film tells the story of how First Nations people chose to enlist in Canada's armed forces in higher numbers than many other communities. After the war, Aboriginal veterans were not offered land entitlement. Some returned home to find the government had already taken away parts of their own reserve land to give to non-native war veterans. Following the film, Dr. Doxtater talked about how the recognition of Aboriginal war veterans by their communities is part of a healing process that has been undertaken by many Aboriginal communities in Canada. He also talked about how he uses the film in workshops to provide an opportunity for adult learners to understand grieving as the first step on the pathway to healing.

**Resilience**

During the session on resilience, Dr. Ron Neizen, Professor in the Department of Anthropology and Canada Research Chair in the Comparative Study of Indigenous Rights and Identity at McGill University, and Chris Lalonde, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Victoria, talked about suicide and suicide prevention among Aboriginal youth. Dr. Neizen argued that using the media to achieve health care funding and autonomy may actually normalize suicide in Aboriginal communities. He suggested that communities need to promote resilience through long-term political planning and intervention, instead of through the media. Dr. Lalonde talked about three community-based research projects in British Columbia that look at the relationship between cultural continuity and Aboriginal youth health. He explained that these projects are trying to find ways of looking at cultural continuity from the point-of-views of Aboriginal communities.

**Student workshop**

The meeting also included a student workshop on research methodologies. The purpose of this workshop was to allow graduate students to present their research and get feedback from senior researchers with expertise in research methods. The workshop was for graduate students who are currently planning their research projects in the area of Aboriginal health. Senior researchers who attended this workshop included Dr. Naomi Adelson, York University, Dr. Adrian Tanner, Memorial University, Dr. Joseph Gone, University of Michigan, and Dr. Chris Lalonde, University of Victoria. The two student presenters were Gregory Brass, McGill University, and Darien Thira, Fielding Institute of Graduate Studies.

Gregory Brass talked about his PhD research project, *Speaking of Cancer on the Path to Healing: Identity, Medical Pluralism, and the Metastasis of Knowledge in First Nations Communities*. His research looks at the experiences of cancer among First Nations men living in different community settings in Saskatchewan. Darien Thira also talked about his PhD research project, *From Suicidal Crisis To Social Activism: Healing Transformations Among Members of the Kwakiutl and Coast Salish Nations*. Darien explained how his research will look at how suicide among Aboriginal people is related to colonization.

The meeting ended with a presentation by Dr. Gail Valaskakis, Director of Research at the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF). Dr. Valaskakis presented the results of the three-volume Final Report of the AHF, which reports on six years of research. The first volume, *A Healing Journey: Reclaiming Wellness*, summarizes what the AHF has learned through research and evaluation. The second volume, *Measuring Progress: Program Evaluation*, combines the data collected from three national surveys in 2000, 2002, and 2004. The third volume, *Promising Healing Practices in Aboriginal Communities*, is about the AHF-funded healing programs that are working well for Aboriginal communities.

Overall this year's Annual Meeting was a success and brought together many different perspectives

about Aboriginal mental health. The meeting also brought together students and researchers who are interested in Aboriginal health research, and who plan to become more involved with the NAMHR.

## Pedagogy of Healing

**Abstract from Annual Meeting 2006 program**

Thohahoken Michael Doxtater, PhD, McGill University

In the era after 1992 Indigenous scholars identified healing unresolved historical grief as the pathway to stable social change for Indigenous peoples. Physical, emotional, or spiritual damage caused by exposure to traumatic events over the past 200 years created direct and collateral trauma complete with survivor guilt, blame, and shame, denial, and numbness. Ironically, these symptoms exist in cultures that have long traditions of healing practices across the continent such as "Wiping each others tears" (East), "Drying of the tears" (Midwest), and "Washing of the tears" (West Coast). One contemporary modality for healing unresolved historical grief derives from research-informed storytelling that strives to be not merely didactic, but has an experimental impact on adult learners. This session focuses on the documentary film "Forgotten Warriors" (NFB 1996) and workshops using the film that provide an opportunity for adult learners that allow them to experience perspective transformations to understand grieving as the first step on the pathway for healing.

## Toward community-based definitions of the relations between cultural continuity and youth health

**Abstract from Annual Meeting 2006 program**

Chris Lalonde, PhD, University of Victoria, Michael Chandler, PhD, University of British Columbia, Anne George University of Northern British Columbia

This presentation offers a brief overview of three interrelated community-based research projects meant to explore relations between measures of cultural continuity and youth health. Building on our earlier epidemiological research (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998), these new efforts will focus on expanding our measures of cultural continuity by partnering with representatives of 28 First Nations communities and asking them collaborate with us in creating measures that best capture the work being done in their own communities. That is, cultural continuity will be defined at a local rather than provincial level. In addition, we are working to expand our list of youth health outcome measures to include not only suicide, but also measures of intended and unintended injury, health system utilization, and school performance. Importantly, the injury data will be collected within the communities (rather than assembled from outside sources) using a newly developed surveillance tool and will be used by the communities to monitor the effects of community-based programs aimed at supporting youth.

## Speaking of Cancer on the Path to Healing: Identity, Medical Pluralism, and the Metastasis of Knowledge in First Nations Communities

**Abstract from Annual Meeting 2006 program**

Greg Brass, MA, McGill University

My research project investigates the experiences of cancer and explores the differences in patterns of resort among First Nations males residing in different community settings in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan: 1) Rural First Nations communities or Indian reserves, 2) Semi-rural multi-ethnic townships, and 3) The city of Saskatoon. The objectives of this ethnographic study are twofold: firstly, it aims to understand the role social networks – communal, familial, and clinical / practitioner / healer – play in creating explanatory models of a chronic disease & structuring allegiances to specific types of

treatment and curing practices; secondly, it will document the causes, consequences and contradictions of disparate systems of knowledge about cancer and various therapeutic practices for treating it. This research hypothesizes that cancer, its discourses, and urban / rural transmigration among First Nations populations plays a central role in the hybridization of indigenous identity. Whether or not this process of hybridization leads to increased rates of survival may be beyond the scope of the project but some anecdotal evidence of enhanced quality of life should be apparent.

## Examination of the socio-historical setting of Inuit healthcare in northern Canada

**NAMHR Student Research**

Lisette Colleen Hoeltzel, Visiting Scholar

My research project is an examination of the socio-historical setting of Inuit healthcare in northern Canada, and an exploration of current suicide research and prevention efforts in Nunavut. I am analyzing the evolving efforts aimed at improving Inuit mental health and alleviating high rates of suicide, and the corresponding gaps in the existing literature and policies. Currently, I am working to obtain interviews with Nunavut government officials and suicide prevention organizations to directly understand what are the perceived problems and accomplishments for effective suicide prevention in the territory.

Lisette can be reached at 06lchoel@alma.edu.

## Resource Materials

The following are recent publications by the NAMHR co-investigators and collaborators:


Adelson, N. (2005). The embodiment of inequity: Health disparities in Aboriginal Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 96, s45-s61.

Adelson, N. (2005). In appreciation of the goose: The relationship between of food, gender and respect amongst the Iiyiyu'ch of Great Whale, Québec. In L. Biggs & P. Downe, (Eds.), *Gendered Intersections: A collection of Readings in Women's and Gender Studies*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Adelson, N. (2005). La Souffrance Collective: Une Analyse Anthropologique De L'Incarnation D'Injustice. (2005). *Revue québécoise de psychologie*, 26(2), 111-127.

Chandler, M. J., & Proulx, T. (2006). Changing selves in changing worlds: Youth suicide on the fault-lines of colliding cultures. *Archives of Suicide Researc*h, 10(2), 125-40.

Fiske, J. (2005). Spirited subjects and wounded souls: Political representations of the im/moral frontier. In M. Rutherdale & K. Pickles (Eds.), *Embodied Contexts*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Fletcher, C. (2006). Environmental Sensitivities: Equivocal Illness in the Context of Place. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 43 (5-6), 86-105.

Kidd, S.A., & Kral, M.J. (2005). Practicing participatory research, *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52, 187-195.

Kirmayer, L.J. (2006). Beyond the 'New Cross-cultural Psychiatry': Cultural Biology, Discursive Psychology and the Ironies of Globalization. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 43 (1): 126-144.

Waldram, J.B. (2006). The View from the Hogan: Cultural Epidemiology and the Return to Ethnography. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 43: 72-85.


A bibliography of Arctic social science theses and dissertations, updates July 15, 2006, is available at www.mcgill.ca/namhr/resources/articles/.

## Announcements

The NAMHR has a new coordinator. Shannon Dow has a master's degree in Social & Cultural Anthropology. Her master's research explored perceptions of type 2 diabetes in Kahnawake, a Mohawk reserve community near to the city of Montreal.

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The schedule for the Division of Social and Cultural Psychiatry's 13th Annual Summer Program is now available online. The Summer Program will run from May 7 – June 4, 2007. For additional information please consult www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/training/summer/.

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The Indian residential schools settlement process has begun, and courts across Canada are holding public hearings to consider whether the settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate. For further information about the settlement process and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, please visit http://www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca/english/index.html.

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The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) has released a three-volume Final Report that presents the AHF's activities over the past six years. The volumes include: *Volume I, A Healing Journey: Reclaiming Wellness*, *Volume 2, Measuring Progress: Program Evaluation*, and *Volume III, Promising Healing Practices in Aboriginal Communities*. To find out more information about the reports, or to order copies, please visit www.ahf.ca or call 1-888-725-8886 (toll-free).

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The First Nations Leadership Council Representing the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the Government of Canada, and the Government of British Columbia signed the First Nations Health Plan Memorandum of Understanding on November 27, 2006. For information about the Memorandum of Understanding, please visit www.gov.bc.ca.

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The Assembly of First Nations recently announced a new campaign called "Make Poverty History: The First Nations Plan for Creating Opportunity." The campaign was launched in collaboration with the global and national efforts to eliminate poverty, with a focus specifically on First Nations communities. For more information about the campaign, please visit www.afn.ca.

## Upcoming Events

**Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, McGill University**

**Annual Advanced Study Institute in Cultural Psychiatry**

***Psychopharmacology in a Globalizing World***
June 12 – 15, 2007

McGill's Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry organizes an annual one week institute for advanced study of current issues in cultural psychiatry. The 2007 Institute will involve a two-day workshop for researchers limited to 40 participants, followed by a two-day conference open to clinicians, policy-makers and others.

**Dates**
Workshop: June 12 – 13, 2007

Conference: June 14 – 15, 2007

**Location**
Institute of Community and Family Psychiatry
4333 Côte Ste-Catherine Road, Montreal, Quebec

For information about the Advanced Study Institute and this year's program, please visit www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/training/advanced/. Alternatively, for information call 514 398 7302, or email tc.psych@mcgill.ca.

**Community-Based Participatory Research**

**Workshop offered in the McGill Summer Program in Social and Cultural Psychiatry**

June 4, 2007
09h00-18h00

This workshop is offered by Dr. A. C. Macaulay and the Kahnawake Community-Researcher Team, and facilitated by the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project researchers and community members. The workshop will address participatory research based on their experiences. Topics will include: participatory research theory; building and maintaining healthy respectful partnerships; developing collaborative project strategies from design through dissemination; ownership of research data; maximizing benefits and minimizing community risks; capacity building and sustainability. The development and application of the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project Code of Research Ethics will be highlighted. Obligations of researchers and community partners will be discussed in the context of the new ethic of respecting community. For more information please visit www.mcgill.ca/tcpsych/training/summer/.

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**NAMHR Mailing List**

The NAMHR mailing list is for researchers, health professionals, and others interested in Aboriginal mental health. The mailing list is a useful place to post announcements (e.g., conferences, job opportunities, etc.), pose questions or locate resource people.

To subscribe to the NAMHR listserv, send a registration email directly to the listserv program at listserv@lists.mcgill.ca. In this email the subject line is to be left blank, and the body of the email should contain the following one line:

SUB NAMHR firstname and lastname (replace the firstname and lastname with your first and last names).

Everyone is welcome to subscribe to the listserv, and we encourage you to sign up!

Alternatively, for more information about NAMHR visit www.mcgill.ca/namhr/, or contact Shannon Dow, NAMHR Coordinator at: 514-340-8222 ext. 2192 or by email at shannonaudrey.dow@mail.mcgill.ca.