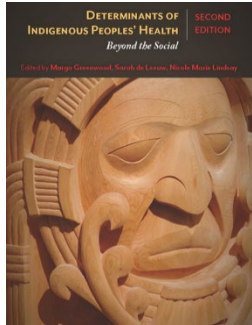




Beyond the Social: Author Interviews



Welcome to [Beyond the Social: Author Interviews](#), a video series produced by the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. The NCCIH focuses on innovative research and community-based initiatives promoting the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. All of the contributors interviewed in this video series, from the highly-acclaimed book [Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada: Beyond the Social](#), share a common concern with improving the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond. In sharing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit traditional knowledge alongside Western academic and medical knowledge, the authors demonstrate the potential gains of walking in two worlds, integrating the best of both Indigenous and Western knowledge, and honouring and respecting the diverse healing and medical practices available to us today.

Video - Chapter 3: Inuit Knowledge Systems, Elders, and Determinants of Health: Harmony, Balance, and the role of Holistic Thinking, with Shirley Tagalik



As part of her interview, Shirley Tagalik discusses Inuit concepts for living a good life. According to Inuit Elders, relationship and interconnectedness with one's environment and to other people are the most important elements for achieving success, balance and holistic health and well-being. These foundations also inform the four big laws of living a good life which include: 1) continually planning and preparing for the future;

2) working for the common good; 3) living in harmony and balance; and 4) being respectful of all living things.

Transcript

My name is Shirley Tagalik and I am a consultant working in Arviat, Nunavut. I am a retired educator and I work now in the areas of health and education.

All Indigenous people view life very holistically. It's a natural integration of things. For me, our Inuit elders described inuusiq (the way they lived) as about people living together in relationship

– relationship being the most important thing in life – and they speak about relations not only with each other but also about relationships with nature and the environment, because everything that Inuit relied on – all their natural resources, all of the materials, everything that sustained life for them – came from the environment. So there has to be a natural connection between people and their environment. The third aspect is how they used the resources from their environment to create technologies that improved their life and enabled them to be more successful. So, for example, building an igloo, or training dogs, or making a harpoon head – all of the materials required for those things came directly from their environment. So, if you are going to have technologies that help you be more successful in life, you have to make sure that you are conserving, preserving, and being a good steward of your environment. So, it's holistically interconnected.

Elders have identified four core laws, and so the purpose in life is to live a good life. And again, most Indigenous communities identify some phrase like that as the key purpose in life. So living a good life requires that you follow these four big laws. So, continually planning and preparing for the future; looking ahead not just at the next generation but multiple generations ahead; making sure that whatever you're doing, the footprint that you're making is a good one for others to follow. That's one of the big laws.

Another one is working for the common good, so the idea that it is our responsibility... it is the responsibility of each person to become capable and as skilled as you can possibly be, to become a master in a certain area, so that you can take the skills that you have and contribute those to improving the lives of others around you. That's the big purpose in life. When we talk about 'inunnguiniq' (becoming a capable human being), a big part of that is to ensure that every child becomes skilled and capable to mastery level so that they can contribute those skills back to improve the lives of people around them.

Another law is living in harmony and balance. When you have a balanced existence, you're taking that holistic perspective and keeping everything in close connection, not overdoing in any one area. When you have that kind of balance in your life, then Inuit feel you can achieve harmony and live in peace both with your natural world and with other people.

The final law is being respectful of all living things. That goes back to, again, the close connection between being oneself and one's environment, between oneself and the people around you. Everyone is interconnected. We're reliant on everything else around us to sustain us in life, and so being respectful of those things is a requirement. Inunnguiniq translates as making a capable human being or making an able person is how they describe it. That isn't just left to chance.

In order for people to live a good life according to those four big laws, there's a specific process very strictly laid out by Inuit for how to train children in that way – the Inuit socialization process. So becoming a capable human being involves becoming skilled in a number of different areas, but really internalizing the values and beliefs that Inuit hold to be important so that you can become a strong, contributing member of the community. Because there is an integration of

the thinking, I think there's a great strength there. Every area informs another area. Everything is connected and everything has significant relationship to everything else.

I think when you begin to view the world in that way, you're not looking for small bandaid solutions to much bigger issues. So in terms of determinants of health, you're looking for creating solutions and seeking solutions that will be holistic and integrated in nature, that will impact every area of a person's life and well-being. That's bound to be much more effective than targeting anti-poverty or improving education or looking at determinants individually. I think that the solutions that may be available to address social determinants of health from an Indigenous perspective will have a lot of resonance with how we could be dealing with social determinants of health for everybody. It's just a good way to life.

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