

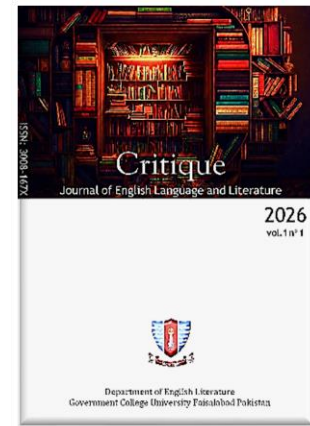
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Trauma, Identity, and Resilience in Doug Boyd's *Rolling Thunder*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Doug Boyd's biographical account *Rolling Thunder* through the analytical framework of trauma theory. Set during the 1960s, a period marked by Native American activism, the book illustrates how Native American communities endured multiple traumatic experiences ranging from racial violence and poverty to cultural dispossession and the disruption of family structures. The research argues that traumatic experiences transform the protagonist, marking their effects on his self-identity, beliefs, and social connections. Through trauma theories developed by Bessel van der Kolk and Judith Herman, this study demonstrates how the protagonist bears both the individual traumatic events and a legacy of trauma inherited through his family history and tribal community. Drawing on van der Kolk's concept of traumatic memory, the study explores *Rolling Thunder*'s recurrent nightmares alongside Herman's idea of complex trauma as manifestations of racial prejudice and societal poverty. A qualitative reading of this book demonstrates that the main character uses avoidance, dissociation, and resilience strategies to manage his traumatic responses. This study offers vital insights into effects of trauma on individuals and groups, thereby re-establishing the essential value of trauma-focused care.

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traumatic memory

Introduction

This research examines intersections of trauma, identity constructs, and narratives of resilience through an analysis of Doug Boyd's *Rolling Thunder*. The story depicts a Native American medicine man surviving multiple traumatic stressors, such as violent racism, economic hardship, and fractured family ties. This study is delimited to analyzing and examining the symbolic representations of Native American resistance against historical trauma in the selected book. This research utilizes insights from Bessel van der Kolk and Judith Herman to explore how the traumatic experiences shape the main character both internally regarding his perception of life and externally regarding his relationships. Moreover, this analysis of trauma, identity, and resilience in Doug Boyd's *Rolling Thunder* under the framework of trauma theory also brings in dialogue the historical trauma and Indigenous healing practices. This theoretical framework is significant because Bessel van der Kolk and Judith Herman explore trauma across individual and collective levels. This

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research confirms that when communities create healing programs based on storytelling, their interventions prove effective within Indigenous populations (Kirmayer et al.). Through storytelling people preserve their cultural identity and find recovery by sharing their stories through a supportive community structure. The studies reveal that culturally responsive healing procedures are crucial to working through trauma among Native peoples (Kirmayer et al.; Smith). Panofsky et al. report that behavioral interventions based on traditional cultural practices show immense potential to enhance mental health results for Indigenous communities (Panofsky et al.). These healing methods integrate traditional practices with community involvement which respects Indigenous cultural traditions.

Through his book *Rolling Thunder*, Boyd demonstrates why cultural approaches matter to rebuild resilience within his characters who confront distressing histories. Scientific findings show a direct relationship between historical trauma and substance abuse among the Indigenous population. Consistent research data presented by the National Institutes of Health indicates that 86.4% of investigations infer a strong association between historical trauma and substance use disorders within Indigenous populations (Smith). Participants from studies link their substance abuse to cultural dislocation and damaged identity, thus showing the necessity of cultural healing approaches to address their challenges. The connection becomes central throughout *Rolling Thunder* when the main character faces identity struggles shaped by ancestral trauma and its impact on his community.

Research shows cultural intervention approaches must be used to support Indigenous communities who are dealing with historical trauma because their needs demand particular attention. For example, Panofsky et al. in their systematic review analyzed numerous research studies employing cultural trauma intervention methods which led to better results for participants. Traditional healing practices, together with community involvement form integral component of interventions designed to help Indigenous peoples develop resilience. His research defines resilience as a flexible wellness process that helps people and groups transform through challenging situations (Panofsky et al.).

Existing literature also indicates that Indigenous peoples' resilience arises mainly from their cultural practices combined with strong community connection and their attachment to ancestral lands. Resilient strategies comprise three essential steps including the development of cultural ties and native language recovery as well as continued involvement among community members (Usher et al.). Traditional protective elements act as buffers that reduce the impact of transgenerational grief that Indigenous communities endure.

Literature Review

This review examines Doug Boyd's *Rolling Thunder* as a multifaceted resource book which draws from historical trauma scholarship, intergenerational analysis, cultural healing techniques and spiritual elements. An examination of the main character's progression through different analytical perspectives demonstrates why trauma studies must account for an individual as well as shared traumatic experiences. Management of historical trauma as experienced by Indigenous populations requires the implementation of community-based approaches together with traditional healing traditions. This research foundation enables us to study psychological trauma and resilience issues affecting Native American communities, specifically in Boyd's narrative alongside other academic studies on Indigenous mental wellness.

Cohen, K. describes Native American medicine as a holistic system of healing that is rooted in traditional cultural practices such as ritual, worshiping, and herbalism (Cohen).

The aim of Native American healing tradition is to find harmony and meaning. This method of healing has been practiced on this continent for possibly more than 60000 years and this healing tradition was also shaped by the interaction of migrant people. Murtaza, et al. explore the deep connection of Native American identity and trauma with environmental degradation and destruction by colonizers. The researchers highlight how Sherman Alexie's writing portrays the cultural and ecological trauma of Native American and how Euro-American's subjugation of environment disrupted the harmony between Native Americans and nature. The destruction of environment and forced dislocation of Native Americans was an attempt to erase their civilization (Murtaza, et al.).

Bezar, et al. analyzed N. Scott Momaday's screenplay *The Moon in Two Windows* for the purpose of centralizing Native American voices and exploring their resistance against Euro-American cultural dominance. The study highlights that Native Americans resist cultural hegemony imposed by colonizers through imaginative revival of their culture. The research analysis introduces elements from resilience theory that reveals how people handle and overcome trauma experiences (Bezar et al.).

Various studies demonstrate that strong connection exists between resilience development, cultural heritage, communal backing, and spiritual experiences. The manifestation of cultural identity together with spiritual practices acts as protective element against traumatic experiences (Chandler and Lalonde). Similarly, Per Gone et al. illustrate how the main character shows resilience via cultural reconnection after trauma experiences that becomes dialogic to scholarly arguments of how Indigenous resilience needs native interventions (Gone et al.). Through his protagonist's *Rolling Thunder*, Boyd demonstrates how spiritual teachings provide both enlightenment and empowerment through their connection to nature and interrelated spiritual systems which serve as trauma healing resources.

This analysis assembles the notion of 'traumatic memory' developed by van der Kolk, so readers can understand the protagonist's persistent traumatic flashbacks. Furthermore, Judith Herman contributes insights about 'complex trauma' which allows us to study how racial violence combines with socio-economic difficulty to affect the protagonist. A qualitative study of Boyd's writing shows the protagonist employing dissociative and avoidance responses, yet also reveals resilience which emerge from his traumatic experiences. The story of *Rolling Thunder* investigates Indigenous trauma and resilience in conjunction with personal and social experiences of racial tension and poverty while also dealing with loss. Through a trauma theory examination, the study identifies how the protagonist's individual encounters intersect with the historical background that shapes his sense of self and worldview.

According to Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, historical trauma describes the psychological and emotional damages which colonization and systemic oppression caused to Indigenous communities. This conceptual basis shows how stress affects both single individuals and the entire structure of their community. Brave Heart indicates that historical trauma produces enduring effects that span across several generations, influencing both family health and community bonds (Brave Heart). The notion of intergenerational trauma from one generation to the next provides the bases for grasping how trauma influences Indigenous communities.

According to Duran, historical oppression creates enduring psychological wounds named 'soul wounds' (Duran 38), which ultimately produce different types of mental distress. In Boyd's *Rolling Thunder* the protagonist illustrates how he copes with his individual identity set against the painful history of his community. According to van der Kolk, traumatic memory manifests through both flashbacks and nightmares in the main

character ([van der Kolk](#)). Traumatic fragmented memories damage the protagonist's sense of identity while revealing how trauma distorts identity.

Boyd accurately represents how trauma changes a person through disrupting their sense of self while altering relationships within the broader storytelling framework. The use of historical trauma theory, intergenerational trauma perspectives, and culturally specific healing practices contribute depth to trauma analysis in *Rolling Thunder*. The analysis frames protagonist experiences in a broader context to highlight how personal trauma needs an examination of social patterns. The focus is on appropriate ritual healing practice that respects Native American identities and fosters resilience. According to Boyd's narrative, community participation emerges as a vital healing element that has been shown by *Rolling Thunder*'s interactions with other people and communities. Research has revealed that healing practices of Indigenous communities which unify traditional approaches represent fundamental ways to build resilience within their populations ([Gone et al.](#)). *Rolling Thunder* endures trauma by applying customary healing rituals within shared community experiences. From Boyd's *Rolling Thunder* readers learn how individual experiences intertwine with those of Indigenous communities. Boyd reveals through his story the healing process of his protagonist so we can see that transformation emerges through his cultural identity while receiving support from his community network. Through his work Boyd also demonstrates the essential relationship between language and healing where words act as instruments for pain communication and healing promotion. Studies today prove the importance of using culturally suitable language because it helps Indigenous populations achieve better therapeutic results ([Gone et al.](#)).

Fast and Collin-Vézina show in their research that governmental policies for assimilation caused substantial psychological harm in indigenous populations. According to their research, cultural identity along with spirituality and self-governance selectively shape individuals' traumatic experiences, while achieving improved mental health results for Indigenous populations ([Fast and Collin-Vézina](#)). Boyd also elucidates that traditional Indigenous healing methods play a key role in dealing with trauma inside native populations. The patient examples from healing ceremonies illustrate how spoken words become channels of spiritual energy through which cultural healing traditions strengthen resilience.

In line with other recovery themes, the author emphasizes how language can energize cultural narratives which foster survival after trauma. *Rolling Thunder* is positioned in a broader framework in this review which combines trauma research, resilience theory, and culturally relevant healing approaches. There is need to adapt Interventions to Indigenous-specific requirements to address their unique population needs; at the same time, they should value community kinship, cultural heritage, and native traditions for helping Native individuals' recovery from historical trauma.

Research Methodology

Bessel van der Kolk remains the leading authority studying trauma by exploring how trauma affects human bodies and brains. He writes: traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: "The past is alive in the form of gnawing inner discomfort" ([van der Kolk 97](#)). According to van der Kolk, trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions (21). Based on "Traumatic Memory", van der Kolk demonstrates that traumatic experiences produce broken memories that are manifested through nightmares and flashbacks. Emotional well-being together with identity depend heavily on how individuals narrate their traumatic memories. Through the "Traumatic Memory model" one can study how the protagonist's racial

violence encounters and personal tragedies create his interaction patterns and world perception that lead him to understand patterns of life. Indigenous peoples struggle with psychological distress that can be clearly explained through historical trauma theory.

Historical trauma presents itself as generations-long accumulated emotional and psychological harm resulting from persistent oppression, colonial violence and systemic assaults as explained by Brave Heart with its further critical development in Bombay's study (Brave Heart; Bombay et al.). Historical trauma produces a collective impact which affects entire communities by uniting them in experiences of pain and devastation (Bombay et al.). Through the character of Rolling Thunder, we can observe intergenerational trauma that demonstrates how ancestral damage shapes both personal identity and cultural perspective. Traditional Native communities bear intergenerational emotional and psychological suffering from colonial invasion, cultural uprooting and institutional suppressive actions. The present work informs how historical trauma is the continual inherited reaction to severe events that creates multiple psychological and social difficulties in Indigenous communities. The analytical framework explains how the protagonist functions in *Rolling Thunder* because history has shaped his personal development through accrued trauma affecting his worldview. In her account of complex trauma, Judith Herman studies how sustained interpersonal trauma generates this pathology in victims. Through his work Herman demonstrates that traumatic experiences exist beyond personal boundaries when they shape entire communities. She asserts: "The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness and thus trauma does not simply leave a narrative memory but often destroys the organizing structure of the self" (Herman 56).

Understanding this viewpoint becomes vital while studying the character of Rolling Thunder, because his individual traumatic experiences reflect the general colonial treatment of Native American communities throughout history. New scientific evidence also demonstrates that cultural continuity creates workable health results (Chandler and Lalonde). According to Boyd's narrative, a return to cultural roots is necessary for the main character's process of healing after traumatic experiences. Indigenous populations affected by historical trauma need culturally appropriate interventions and services that are responsive to diverse community needs. Moreover, meaningful outcomes in mental health therapy require integrating Indigenous cultural knowledge systems. This approach demonstrates why traditional community-based practices and cultural involvement serve as essential foundations for developing resilience. Numerous Indigenous individuals demonstrate strong resilience through cultural ties along with community backing despite enduring historical trauma on a widespread scale (Bombay et al.). Boyd portrays this resilience by demonstrating how the main character links to his origins and society for cultural preservation and to resist the impact of trauma.

Analysis and Discussion

Boyd demonstrates the resilience by showing how the main character links to his origins and society and cultural preservation that helps him resist impacts of trauma. In Boyd's story, traditional Indigenous healing methods play a key role in dealing with trauma inside native populations. The patient examples from healing ceremonies highlights how "spoken words become channels of spiritual energy through which cultural healing traditions strengthen resilience" (Boyd 142). The actual traumatic event leaves trauma behind in the memory that continues to impact thoughts and physical wellbeing. According to van der Kolk's research, traumatic experiences emerge as disconnected sensory events

instead of structured mental impressions as the main character experiences them in his terrifying dreams (van der Kolk). The analysis of complex trauma by Judith Herman extends this analysis by informing about the protagonist's accumulative distress (Herman). Over a long period of time the character endures multiple traumatic situations that connect with one another. Multiple racial assaults combined with his experience of poverty and family turmoil generate an enduring psychological strain for him. The researcher asserts that continuous trauma exposure produces both personality fragmentation and dissociative states. In *Rolling Thunder*, the protagonist frequently detaches from his emotions, using avoidance as a coping strategy: “When things got tough, I would escape inside my own mind so completely I lost the sense of feeling anything else in the world and imagined being a different person entirely” (Boyd 187).

Trauma separates people from their selves because serious experiences shatter the foundations of their identity structure. The protagonist struggles to detach himself from the past trauma, which hinders his ability to work. His delay in confronting unpleasant memories will make his healing journey very challenging. Along with enduring serious traumatic experiences, the protagonist exhibits strong mental traits of recovering. It can be said that true resilience extends beyond symptom free recovery from trauma to include important adaptive qualities that help individuals regain their sense of control over their life events. Through his confrontation of violence and his hold on future hope, the protagonist displays the true strength of his resilience. Boyd's character is enabled to learn essential elements for healing trauma that include building relationships and forming solidarity with others.

Boyd presents resilience as an active process, one that involves engaging with trauma rather than avoiding it: “Running no longer provided me with shelter so I decided to stand up against what I faced. I tolerated the emotional crisis combined with overwhelming fear while facing all my repressed internal pain from the past years” (Boyd 233). Herman explains that healing from complex trauma requires people to find control over their life narrative as part of the healing process. Through their developmental progression, the protagonist follows essential trauma-informed care processes which include facing painful memories while learning how to trust and establish new relationships. Throughout Boyd's narrative, trauma functions as a dominating transformative force which creates an individual's personal identity. *Rolling Thunder*, a medicine man, prohibits to “trust the water that flows down the white man” (Boyd 148). He sees nature as healer and helper. The protagonist's troubles reveal systematic historical trauma which affects his whole community. Traumatic memory furthermore helps demonstrate why the main character's current state remains shaped by his past experiences. It is observed that unresolved trauma creates persistent nightmares alongside flashbacks that disrupt vision, ultimately deforming a person's identity (van der Kolk).

Herman's theory about complex trauma further demonstrates how lengthy suffering from traumatic events leads to change personal identity patterns together with strained personal relationships (Herman). Governmental policies for assimilation caused substantial psychological harm in indigenous populations. According to a research, cultural identity along with spirituality and self-governance selectively shape individuals' traumatic experiences, while achieving improved mental health results for Indigenous populations (Fast and Collin-Vézina). Boyd also elucidates that traditional Indigenous healing methods play a key role in dealing with trauma inside native populations. The patient examples from healing ceremonies illustrate how spoken words become channels of spiritual energy through which cultural healing traditions strengthen resilience.

For understanding recurring nightmares and flashbacks in the protagonist, van der

Kolk established his concept of traumatic memory. Unresolved trauma shows itself through symptoms that disrupt a person's awareness of both themselves and the world. Judith Herman provides additional details regarding complex trauma and its impacts on people exposed to multiple traumatic encounters. Personal hardships endured by the protagonist demonstrate both personal and communal historical trauma throughout his community while revealing deep connections between self and communal identity. Boyd claims that Indigenous healing traditions shape essential methods through which Native communities can manage their traumatic experiences. As taught by Rolling Thunder, healing requires individuals to become whole again while finding their way back to ancestral heritage and strengthening bonds within their community. Duran and Duran found, Native healing methods work best to heal historical trauma through the integrated spiritual and Native cultural frameworks (Duran and Duran).

Through his narrative, Boyd offers an opportunity for studying Native American knowledge structures and traditional practices of healing. The spiritual teachings transmitted through *Rolling Thunder* demonstrate a holistic perspective which instantly emphasizes coherence with nature and respect for all living species. The Indigenous worldview confronts Western concepts of land propriety while proposing management systems based on stewardship together with reciprocity (Deloria). Judith Herman's exploration of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) offers a deeper understanding of PTSD, especially within Indigenous communities. According to Herman, CPTSD occurs through persistent traumatic encounters when victims remain confined in terrifying situations for long periods. The protagonist's life struggles in *Rolling Thunder* depict a universal state of captivity which extends from his individual circumstances into the social oppression that Native Americans experience as a group. The extensive study of historical trauma among Indigenous communities reveals that it brings deep psychological consequences. As *Brave Heart* mentions, historical trauma signifies the multiple emotional and psychological injuries that occur because of systemic oppression, colonization and persecution. Such traumatic experiences transmit through generations to impact descendants of Indigenous communities who survived injustice (Bombay et al.). Throughout *Rolling Thunder*, Boyd illustrates both mental turmoil and identity crisis, which represent enduring historical trauma among Native American communities.

Conclusion

Doug Boyd's *Rolling Thunder* has provided a deeper insight into how trauma affects both identity and resilience, specifically within marginalized communities. The analysis has proved that trauma produces substantial individual and communal impacts that transform the protagonist's entire perspective of self and social relationships. The main character's coping methods consisting of avoidance techniques, dissociation, and resilience help us recognize sophisticated strategies for facing traumatic experiences. These coping mechanisms function as temporary solutions, yet indicate how the protagonist fights for mastery and significant purpose despite living within an environment of structural discrimination and deep personal loss. This qualitative research expands knowledge about how trauma affects personal identity while focusing on communities that have suffered from continuous oppression in history. The work has provided both a meaningful literary analysis and practical insights for trauma-informed therapeutic interventions, which also establishes a substantial significance for trauma theory. Boyd's literary insights contribute actionable perspectives to support existing trauma-informed healthcare and educational practices that help build understanding the aftermath of trauma across socially adopted systems. The work further suggests new mechanisms and procedures, and calls for the

development that prioritize both compassion and trauma-sensitive approaches to better recognize diverse human capacities to adapt to tough situations for survival and recovery.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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