



Canada's Emerging Aboriginal Millennials



*A National Survey Reading of
Aboriginal Teens & Other Teens*

by

Dr. Reginald W. Bibby

Reflections and Responses by
Terri-Lynn Fox and James Penner

Project Canada Books

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I also want to express my great appreciation to Terri-Lynn Fox the Aboriginal Sample Coordinator, James Penner, the Associate Director of Project Teen Canada 2008, and Dave Bibby, who oversaw data entry, for their indispensable contributions.

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Preface

This project grew out of our Project Teen Canada 2008 national survey. That survey, the fourth in a series of national youth surveys carried out since the 1980s, is unique in contributing to comparative readings of Canadian young people over time.

But an informal conversation with Dr. Mark Fonda at the Canadian Congress Meetings in Vancouver in June of 2008 raised the possibility of adding an invaluable feature. Dr. Fonda, the Senior Research Manager with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, asked if we would have a sizable Aboriginal component in our projected final sample of some 4,000 young people. The conversation served as a reminder that young Aboriginal voices needed to be heard.

That initial conversation evolved into a decision on my part to add at least 500 young people to the 2008 survey who were attending Aboriginal-run schools across the country. Such a sampling supplement would make it possible to obtain a valuable national reading of Aboriginal young people. But, carried out in conjunction with the Project Teen Canada national youth survey, the sample supplement could provide a unique opportunity to compare Aboriginal young people with a large sample of Canadian young people more generally. INAC's tangible contribution took the form of funding an initial summary report of the findings; I, in turn, applied those funds to the additional costs of adding the Aboriginal supplement.

This report provides a fairly detailed analysis of the thoughts of Aboriginal youth, placed in the context of the Project Teen Canada 2008 findings more generally. As such, it complements my 2009 book, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation is Responding to Change and Choice* (projectcanadabooks.com).

The production of the Aboriginal supplement sample was greatly enhanced by the contributions of Terri-Lynn Fox and James Penner. Terri-Lynn provided valuable counsel on Aboriginal culture and also assisted with data collection. James dealt directly with school personnel and played a key role in securing a high level of participation. Jean Lafrance was among those who offered advice on the slightly revised questionnaire. Dave Bibby coded and entered the data. Terri-Lynn and James, with the assistance in turn of First Nations members Shelley Stigter and Val Goodrider McFarlane, have helped to begin discussions about the meaning and implications of the findings in this report by offering section-by-section commentaries and concluding reflections.

The sample is highly representative of Aboriginals between the ages of 15 and 19 who are attending band schools, versus all teens in that age range. Still, drop-outs have not been totally omitted: 22% of the sample report that they dropped out of school at some point in their lives.

I am particularly grateful to the students and school personnel whose efforts have resulted in the input of young Aboriginals. Thanks to them, I believe that this material is very special.

Reginald W. Bibby
Lethbridge – September 2010

INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the mid-1970s, I have been carrying out a series of national adult and youth surveys from the University of Lethbridge. The surveys have consisted of seven “Project Canada” surveys of adults conducted every five years from 1975 through 2005, and four complementary “Project Teen Canada” surveys completed in 1984, 1992, 2000, and 2008.

The surveys have generated comprehensive information on attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour. The adult samples have averaged about 1,500 people who are 18 and over, and have been highly representative of the adult population. The youth samples have been comprised of teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 who are still in high schools/secondary schools or their equivalents (e.g., CEGEPs in Quebec). These highly representative samples have been comprised of an average of about 3,800 cases.¹

The Latest National Youth Survey

The most recent youth survey, Project Teen Canada 2008, was carried out between approximately March 15 and June 15 of 2008, with some sample holes filled in the fall. I served as the Project Director, with James Penner – an adjunct professor in our Department of Sociology – the Associate Director. The methodology used in the 1984, 1992, and 2000 Project Teen Canada surveys was replicated.² A total of 4,746 questionnaires were received from 245 of 308 schools contacted – a level of participation of 80% that was similar to previous years. That figure included approximately 500 young people who were part of an Alberta oversample, as requested by one of the two funding sources.

In September of 2008, I made the decision to pursue a national oversample of about 500 Aboriginal teenagers from band-run schools who, when added to the close to 150 Aboriginals in the PTC08 survey, would result in a sample of more than 600 Aboriginals.³ Terri-Lynn Fox, who at the time was an Academic Assistant at the University of Lethbridge and a member of the nearby Blood Tribe, served as the Aboriginal Sample Coordinator.

¹The 1984, 1992 and 2000 totals were 3,530, 3,891 and 3,501 respectively.

²For details regarding those surveys, see Bibby and Posterski 1985:201-205 and 1992:32-324; Bibby 2001:327-332). The 2008 survey was funded by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research and the Lilly Endowment through the Louisville Institute. In the case of Alberta, the Alberta Centre requested an oversample, adding about 500 cases to the national sample.

³The infrastructure for the survey was already in place; funds generated from the project itself, such as analyses, were used to cover additional costs.

A national sample of some 35 schools was selected, supplemented by an Alberta oversample of 15 schools; the latter were drawn to provide a counterpart to the PTC08 oversample in that province. The data were collected between approximately the end of November of 2008 and the end of February 2009.

A total of 42 schools (84%) participated, providing a total of 818 usable questionnaires – 500 nationally, plus an oversample of 318 from Alberta (bringing the Alberta total to 420). The 818 cases have been weighted to 500 to ensure regional representativeness. The sample is almost evenly divided between females (52%) and males (48%). Generalizations to the Aboriginal high school student population should be accurate within about +/- 5% points of the actual population figure, 19 times in 20.

	Population	Sample
British Columbia	17%	17
Alberta	17	17
Saskatchewan	14	14
Manitoba	15	15
Ontario	19	19
Quebec	8	8
Atlantic	5	5
North	5	5

The original PTC08 sample includes 141 Aboriginals who were attending off-reserve schools. These cases are reported separately in unweighted form. The sample fairly closely mirrors regional population proportions, although Alberta and the North are slighted overrepresented. Obviously the sample is too small to permit highly accurate generalizations. Nonetheless, the results provide something of a “preliminary peek” at Aboriginal students in off-reserve schools and are included for heuristic purposes.

Aboriginals attending band-run schools: <i>weighted</i>	500
Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools: <i>unweighted</i>	141
Total national teenage population: <i>weighted</i>	4,600

Hopefully the numbers will stimulate thought and further research efforts that make use of much larger off-reserve samples.

The total Project Teen Canada 2008 weighted sample consists of 4,600 cases. The sample is highly representative of the Canadian population.⁴ Results are accurate within about 3 percentage points either way, 19 times in 20. Given the currency of the surveys, the present tense is used throughout this report.

⁴When weighted to reflect the characteristics of the entire Canadian population of teenagers, 15-to-19, the number of Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools is 108, reserve schools 106, total 214 or approximately 4% of the total sample – very close to population estimates calculated from census data.

1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Self-Identification, Birthplace, and Residence

Just over 90% of the young people attending band-operated schools describe themselves as “First Nations,” with the rest almost evenly divided between “Métis” and “Inuit”; only about 1% indicate they are not Aboriginal. Of those who view themselves as “First Nations,” 84% say they are status, 1% non-status, and 2% Bill C-31; the remaining 13% are not sure.

As would be expected, there is more diversity among Aboriginals who attend schools off-reserve. Slightly more than 70% describe themselves as “First Nations,” 20% as “Métis,” and 8% as “Inuit.”⁵

Table 1.1. Self-Identification of Aboriginal Teens (%)

	Reserve	Off-Reserve
First Nations	91	72
Métis	4	20
Inuit	4	8
Other	1	--

Almost all of our Aboriginal students (some 98%) indicate that they were born in Canada with most of the remainder born in the United States. The level for other teenagers is 83%.

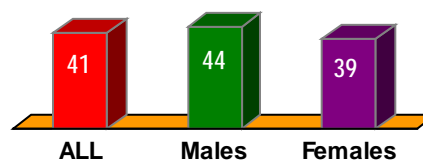
Some 88% of those teens attending band-run schools live on reserves.

Languages and Traditional Names

Virtually all of the students who attend Aboriginal schools claim to be bilingual, indicating that they fluently speak either English or French *and* an Aboriginal language. Only 12% of those who attend off-reserve schools make the same claim. The key to such retention of Aboriginal languages seems to be seniors. Statistics Canada reports that, as of 2001, 79% of First Nations seniors living on reserves could converse in an Aboriginal language, versus only 32% who lived off-reserve.⁶

About 4 in 10 of the Aboriginal school students also indicate that they have traditional names – led by slightly more males (44%) than females (39%).

Figure 1.1. Traditional Names by Gender (%)



⁵Nationally, the 2001 census revealed that First Nations people made up 62% of the Aboriginal population, 30% identified as Métis, and 5% as Inuit; 3% could not be classified into just one Aboriginal group. Some 80% of First Nations people reported that they were registered under the Indian Act (“Aboriginal Peoples,” 2007 Canada Year Book).

⁶“Seniors: Foundation of their communities,” 2007 Canada Year Book.

Parentage and Home Environments

The marital status of the parents of Aboriginal teenagers attending both band-run schools and other schools differs fairly markedly from the national teenage population as a whole.

- Approximately 1 in 3 Aboriginal teens indicate that their biological parents are *married* to each other, versus 2 in 3 of all Canadian teens.
- About 10% of Aboriginals say their natural parents are living *common-law*; the national figure is 4%.
- Around 45% of Aboriginals say that their biological parents *are no longer together*, a figure that is significantly higher than the national level of 25%.
- Another 10% of Aboriginal teens report that either one or both of their parents are *deceased*, compared to just 4% for all teenagers.

Table 1.2. Marital Status of Parents (%)
"Are your biological father and mother currently..."

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Married to each other	67	34	35
No longer married to each other	21	33	24
Living common law	4	10	11
No longer living common-law	4	12	20
One or both are no longer alive	3	8	9
Other	1	3	1
Total	100	100	100

Highlighted: Aboriginal figure varies by 10% or more.

These various parental situations are reflected in current living situations.

- Some 7 in 10 teenagers across Canada are currently *living with both their parents*, and almost another 1 in 10 with *a parent and a stepparent*.
- In the case of Aboriginals, about 5 in 10 are living with parents or stepparents.
- About 15% of teens across the country are living with either their *mothers* or their *fathers*; the figure for Aboriginals is just under 25% both on and off reserves.
- *Other arrangements* – including living with relatives, friends, or foster parents – are more common for Aboriginals than teens as a whole, in part reflecting communal kinship patterns.

Table 1.3. Current Home Situation (%)

<i>Currently Living With:</i>	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Mother-Father	70	41	41
Mother only	12	13	19
Mother-Stepfather	6	11	7
Father only	3	9	5
Father-Stepmother	2	2	3
Mother-Male partner	2	3	43
Father-Female partner	<1	1	1
Other	5	20*	20**
Total	100	100	100

*Varied: family members, friends, girlfriend/boyfriend, foster home, alone.
 **9% grandparents, 4% aunt/uncle, 7% other.

Consistent with these findings, a Statistics Canada (2008) analysis of 2006 census data revealed that higher proportions of young Aboriginal children are growing up in large families and are being raised by young parents, compared with non-Aboriginal children. The report also noted that, frequently, many people, including extended family and community members, are involved in raising young Aboriginal children.

Socio-economic Status

The parents of Aboriginal teens tend to have lower levels of formal education than other Canadian parents.

- Just over 30% of those attend reserve schools indicate that their parents have completed post-secondary degrees or diplomas, compared to around 40% of Aboriginals who are enrolled in off-reserve schools. The national figure is about 65%.
- About 25% of Aboriginals attending reserve schools say their parents have not completed high school, considerably higher than other Aboriginals and students as a whole across the country.
- Aboriginal mothers are somewhat more likely to have more formal education than fathers.

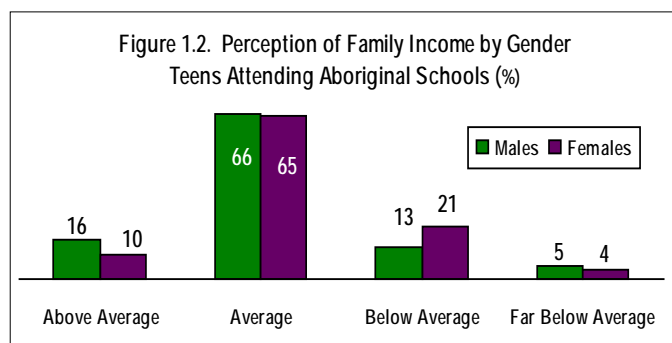
Highest Level Completed	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Father			
University degree-plus	39	21	13
Trade-Business-college	25	21	19
High School/secondary	26	37	44
<High school/secondary	10	21	24
Mother			
University degree-plus	38	25	18
Trade-Business-college	25	21	18
High School/secondary	30	41	37
<High school/secondary	7	13	27

We didn't ask students about the specifics of their families' incomes – in part because of the implications we felt it may have had for obtaining permission to have students participate. However, we did ask teens for the perception of their family's income, compared with the level of other families.

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Above average	23	22	13
Average	56	59	66
Below average	18	17	17
Far below average	3	2	4
Total	100	100	100

What we found is that (a) there is little difference between the perception of income levels between Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools and non-Aboriginals across Canada.

Young people attending reserve schools are less likely than others to see their family incomes as "above average" and more likely to see them as "average." However, despite objective differences, students attending Aboriginal schools – led by males – are no more likely than other teens to view those incomes as "below average" or "far below" average.



We'll come back to this topic when we look at the extent to which teens worry about money in general and their family's lack of money more specifically.

Religious Identification

About 5 in 10 teens who attend Aboriginal schools cite “Aboriginal spirituality” as their religious preference. Close to another 2 in 10 say their preference is Catholicism, Protestantism, or simply “Christian.” Most of the remaining 3 in 10 say they have no religion, although 5% indicate they have some “Other” form of religion.

Aboriginal teens attending off-reserve schools are less likely to identify with Aboriginal

spirituality (25%) and somewhat more likely to cite Christianity (32%) as their religious preference. They also are more inclined than their counterparts on reserves to say they have no religion (38%), and no more likely to identify with “Other” religions.

Table 1.6. Religious Identification (%)
“What is your general religious preference?”

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Aboriginal spirituality	2	25	48
Catholic	34	22	12
Protestant	13	8	4
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	3	2	2
Other	16	5	5
None	32	38	29
Total	100	100	100

Summary Note

These findings on some demographic characteristics serve to remind us of a number of ways in which Aboriginal teens differ from the Canadian teenage population as a whole. Some of these features – notably their Aboriginal identity, their home environments, their socio-economic backgrounds, and their religious inclinations – help us to understand both how they resemble and how they differ from Canadian teens as a whole when it comes to such things as their values, attitudes, sources of enjoyment, concerns, and expectations.

Reflections and Responses

Some Important Facts

- Young Aboriginals have lives rooted in distinct cultures – complete with their own names and languages. High levels of bilingualism speak of cultural retention.
- Aboriginal teens are not lined up evenly with other Canadian young people when they come out of life's starting gates. They frequently have different home settings and financial and educational limitations that make life difficult from the outset.
- The religion of most Aboriginals has an important component of spirituality that is grounded in Aboriginal culture and history.

Some Important Responses

- ✓ Just like immigrants from outside Canada, the uniqueness and contributions of Aboriginal cultures need to be recognized and respected - perhaps even more so because they are Canada's founding nations.
- ✓ The disadvantaged position that Aboriginals often face because of family structures, educational levels, and financial difficulties needs to be clearly understood. Moreover, improved efforts need to be made to provide the human and economic resources that will enable more young Aboriginals to “catch up” to other young people in these areas.
- ✓ The reality of the importance of Aboriginal spirituality in the lives of teenagers needs to be fully acknowledged and permitted expression as part of Canada's religious mosaic.

2. THINGS VALUED AND ENJOYED

What's Important

Teenagers across the country place premier importance on two things: *friendship* and *freedom*.

- Following behind but highly valued by most are such traits and goals as *being loved, a comfortable life, a good education, and success*.
- *Family life and excitement* are also very important to a majority of young people.
- *Cleanliness and hard work* are also highly valued by more than 1 in 2 teens.
- Of importance to fewer numbers: *money, spirituality, and one's cultural group background*.

What is readily apparent is that *Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools* closely resemble other non-Aboriginal teens in the importance they give to these themes and goals. The only notable exceptions are the greater importance *Aboriginals* give to spirituality and, in particular, their cultural group backgrounds.

Teens who are *attending Aboriginal schools* are not quite as inclined to place a “very high” level of importance on friendship, freedom, and a comfortable life. But they are far more likely to see family life, cultural group background, and spirituality as extremely important. They also are a bit more likely to place a very high level of importance on getting a good education, along with cleanliness and hard work.

It is interesting to note that gender differences are found both for the total population of Canadian teenagers as well as for *Aboriginals*, regardless of where they are attending school. In general, females are more likely than males to place importance on all of these valued goals, although the rank order is very similar for both sexes. That rank order by gender holds even in the case of the importance that teens in *Aboriginal schools* give to family, cultural group, and spirituality.

Table 2.1. What Teenagers Want
% Viewing as “Very Important”

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Friendship	86	84	77
Freedom	85	85	77
Being loved	79	76	73
A comfortable life	75	74	63
Getting a good education	73	73	80
Success in what you do	73	68	72
Family life	67	61	83
Excitement	64	67	64
Cleanliness	59	60	66
Working Hard	55	60	62
Money	44	45	41
Spirituality	27	35	41
Your cultural group background	22	36	57

*Differences of 10 percentage points or more are highlighted.

Table 2.2. What Teenagers Want by Gender
% Viewing as "Very Important"

	NATIONAL		ABORIG OFF		ABORIG ON	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Friendship	89	83	89	79	82	73
A comfortable life	76	75	81	67	63	62
Getting a good education	79	67	81	65	87	72
Family life	74	60	66	56	85	81
Spirituality	28	26	38	32	44	37
Your cultural group background	22	22	42	31	61	53

Sources of Enjoyment

The major sources of enjoyment for young people continue to be *friends* and *music* – just as we have found in all of our youth surveys dating back to 1984.⁷

What is new are the ways in which both can be experienced, thanks to the advent of the *Internet* and the arrival of *iPods* and *MP3 players*.

- Other important sources of enjoyment continue to be *relational* – parents, siblings and grandparents, boyfriends and girlfriends – and pets.
- Among the additional top sources of enjoyment for teenagers are *one's own room*, *television*, and *shopping*, along with *school*, *reading*, and *video and computer games*.
- Aboriginals *attending off-reserve schools* differ very little from teens across the country as far as their top sources of enjoyment.⁸
- That said, teenagers who *attend Aboriginal schools* exhibit a few noteworthy differences.

Table 2.3. Sources of Enjoyment
% Receiving "A Great Deal" or "Quite a Bit"

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Friends	95	96	92
Music	92	96	89
The Internet	83	80	76
Your iPod/MP3	80	85	82
Your mother	79	76	87
Your own room	74	77	82
Your father	73	75	78
Sports	70	65	73
Brother(s) or sister(s)	66	68	83
Your grandparent(s)	66	68	81
Television	64	57	59
Shopping	61	54	66
Your boyfriend/girlfriend	59	65	59
Your pet(s)	56	59	48
Your cell phone	56	53	53
School	53	57	74
E-mail	52	58	57
Reading	47	42	44
Video/computer games	45	56	55

Greater proportions say they receive high levels of enjoyment from their mothers, siblings, and grandparents, along with school and shopping. The latter may be a positive recreational activity for many. Enjoyment of pets is a bit lower. Their enjoyment levels related to making use of "the new technology" – the Internet, iPods, cell phones, and e-mail – tend to be fairly similar to everyone else.

⁷See Bibby 2009:26-27.

⁸A 2006 Statistics Canada survey revealed that First Nations children between the ages of 6 and 14 who lived off reserve were as likely as all children in Canada to be doing well in school. This positive experience with school appears to be carrying over into high school for many children (Statistics Canada 2009a).

Generally-speaking, *Aboriginals differ little* from the rest of the teen population when it comes to the extent that they are *doing a number of things every day*.⁹ Those activities include:

- ✓ watching television,
- ✓ using a computer,
- ✓ listening to music,
- ✓ sitting – or taking a walk – and thinking,
- ✓ doing something to stay in shape,
- ✓ following the news, or
- ✓ following sports – except, in the case of those attending band-run schools who are more inclined than teens as a whole to follow all pro sports except the NFL – largely because of a greater interest on the part of young Aboriginal females (e.g., NHL: 36% for Aboriginal females living on reserves vs. 25% for females nationally).

Aboriginals engage in many of the same activities as other Canadian teenagers, and approximately as often. Exceptions include:

- ✓ playing video and computer games, along with gambling with money – which they do more, and
- ✓ going to movies and religious services – which they do less.

Table 2.4. Some Daily Activities

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Watch television	99%	99	99
Use a computer	99	99	98
Listen to music	87	92	84
Sit/take a walk & think	48	43	42
Do something stay in shape	33	28	32
Follow sports	22	24	24
Keep up with the news	17	13	14

Table 2.5. Interest in Pro Sports (%)
Follow "Very Closely" or "Fairly Closely"

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
NHL	35	39	45
NBA	21	23	29
NFL	19	19	16
CFL	14	12	17
MLB	10	10	17

Table 2.6. Other Common Activities

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
<i>Weekly-Plus</i>			
Play video computer games	49%	59	63
Read books you <i>want</i> to read	36	35	38
Play instrument/wk on music	35	30	35
Pray privately	30	24	30
Party	28	34	25
Read Bible/other Scriptures	13	10	11
<i>Monthly-Plus</i>			
Go to a movie	72	64	59
Attend a sports event	48	55	***
Attend a religious service	33	19	25
Gamble with money	15	31	34

⁹This general pattern of "little difference" is reported by Statistics Canada for sports participation among children 14 and under (Statistics Canada 2007). As of 2006, 76% of Aboriginals 15 and over who were residing in "rural" areas said they had used a computer in the previous twelve months, and 71% said the same about the Internet. Some 86% of this same group indicated their homes had cable or satellite television (2006 Profile of Aboriginal Children, Youth and Adults).

Friends

Over the past decade or so, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of close friends that Canadian teenagers say they have. In 1984, 49% indicated they had 4 or more close friends; today that figure stands at 72%, with most of the increase occurring since the beginning of the new century.¹⁰ Only 1 in a 100 teens say they have no close friends.

The figures for Aboriginals are virtually the same as for other young people across Canada. Females and males everywhere are equally likely to claim they have a number of close friends.

Table 2.7. Number of Close Friends (%)

	NAT	ABOFF	ABORIG ON		
			ALL	F	M
Four-plus	72	76	76	77	75
Three	16	14	12	11	14
Two	9	8	9	9	9
One	2	1	2	2	2
None	1	1	1	1	1

Undoubtedly, the growth in the electronic means of communicating with friends has contributed significantly to the sense among today's teens that they have a larger number of close friends than their counterparts even a decade or so ago. Young people who attend Aboriginal schools are less likely than others to indicate they are making daily use of cell phones, text messaging, and e-mail, as well as accessing social network sites such as Facebook.

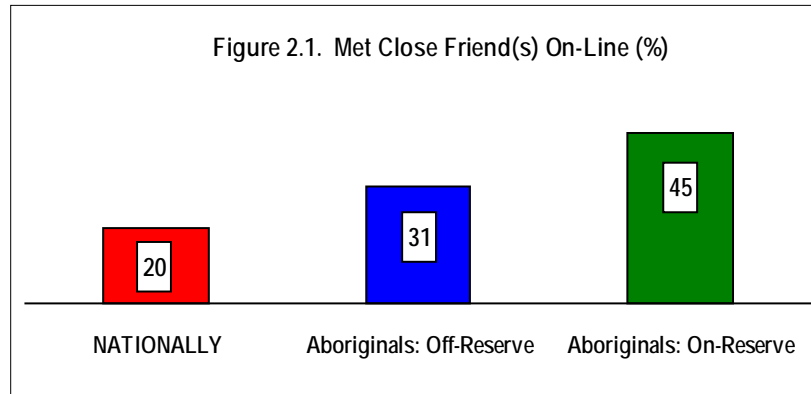
That said, Aboriginals attending reserve schools nonetheless are making extensive use of all of these devices and sites, and actually claim to be accessing YouTube more often than other teens. Female use exceeds that of males in all instances – a pattern that also is found among teenagers across the country, with the sole exception of YouTube.¹¹

Table 2.8. Some Key Means of Communication
Use or Access Daily

	NAT	ABOFF	ABORIG ON		
			ALL	F	M
Use a cell phone	54%	47	36	43	28
Text message	44	43	34	40	28
Access Facebook	43	45	29	37	21
Use e-mail	42	43	34	43	25
Access YouTube	27	26	34	35	33

- Of considerable importance, 45% of teens who attend Aboriginal schools say they have met at least one of their close friends on-line – considerably higher than Aboriginals who attend off-reserve schools (31%) and more than double the figure for Canadian teenagers as a whole (20%).
- That 45%, incidentally, is almost equally comprised of females (46%) and males (44%).
- Significantly 83% of teens who attend Aboriginal schools say that they have at least one close friend who does not live on their reserve. The Internet appears to be an important factor that is contributing to this geographical expansion of friends.

¹⁰Bibby 2009:31.



Groups

We offered teens a list of six kinds of groups, and asked them if they are part of any of them. We also gave them the opportunity to list any additional groups in which they are involved.

What we found is that the two most popular kinds of groups for teenagers across the country are *sports* and *Internet-related*. They are part of sports groups and teams, and also part of Internet social networks of one kind or another. In both instances, the level of involvement for Aboriginals is fairly similar to others – particularly in the case of the Internet.

- About 30% of Canadian teens are involved in *school-related* groups. However, the figure drops off to 20% for Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools. In Aboriginal schools, involvement in school groups is even slightly lower at 15%.
- *Hobby* and *religious groups* each know an involvement level around 15% nationally, with that level dropping off in both instances for Aboriginals.
- *Other groups* – including cultural and ethnic groups in off-reserve settings and dance groups in Aboriginal schools – know involvement levels of 5% or less.

Table 2.9. Involvement in Groups (%)
"Are you part of any of the following groups?"

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Sports	48	43	40
Internet	45	43	45
School	31	20	15
Hobby	18	17	12
Religious	14	11	5
Nationality	5	6	**
Dance	**	**	4
Other	4	5	2

¹¹Bibby 2009:28.

Gender patterns for group involvement are fairly similar among Aboriginals and other teenagers.

- Males are more inclined than females to be involved in team and group sports, although the gender difference is quite small on reserves.
- Females are far more likely to be involved in Internet social networks, particularly in the case of teens in Aboriginal schools.
- Among non-Aboriginals, involvement in school groups tends to be slightly higher for females than males.
- Gender differences in religious group participation are small but slightly favour females.

Relational websites are particularly important to females everywhere, but also are the no. 1 favourite of males. *YouTube* is more popular among males than females, especially so on reserves.

Table 2.10. Involvement in Groups by Gender (%)

	NATIONAL		ABORIG OFF		ABORIG ON	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Sports	40	56	37	49	38	43
Internet	48	41	47	39	53	36
School	35	27	20	20	16	13
Religious	15	12	16	6	6	5

Table 2.11. Favourite Websites by Gender (%)

	NATIONAL		ABORIG OFF		ABORIG ON	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Relational	58	24	64	26	71	39
Facebook	50	20	50	16	36	19
Bebo	<1	<1	<1	<1	33	17
Other	8	4	14	10	2	3
Sports	2	16	0	12	1	10
You Tube	6	11	5	14	6	22
Computer games	2	12	2	18	3	4
Music	3	6	5	6	2	7

Perceived Sources of Influence

Enjoyment sources are somewhat closely related to *sources of influence*, with a few exceptions. Overall, the country's teens are inclined to feel the primary sources of influence on their lives are their families, own willpower, and friends. They tend to downplay the impact of their teachers, television, the Internet, and leaders.

- *Aboriginal young people* stand out in further underlining the importance of other adults who they respect, besides their parents.
- *Teens attending Aboriginal schools* are also more inclined than other youth – Aboriginal and otherwise – to acknowledge the influence on their lives of teachers, television, and the Internet, along with God/the Creator, luck, and what people in power decide.

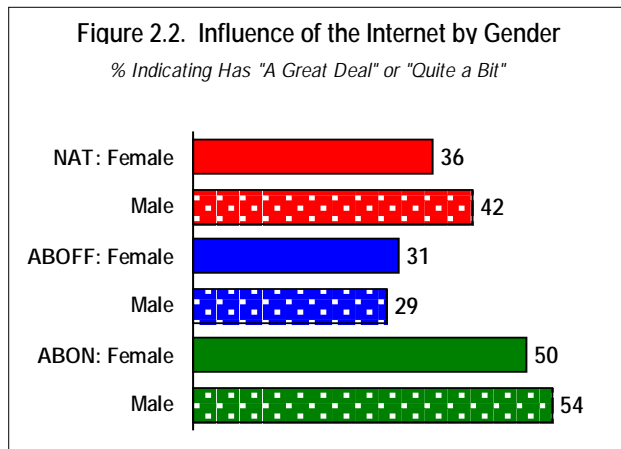
Table 2.12. Perceived Sources of Influence

% Seeing as Influencing Their Lives
"A Great Deal" or "Quite a Bit"

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
The way you were brought up	92	89	88
Your own willpower	89	86	82
Your mother specifically	89	88	86
Your friend(s)	86	84	84
Your father specifically	82	82	78
The characteristics born with	76	78	84
Another adult(s) you respect	65	74	82
What you read	49	46	45
Your teacher(s)	45	50	58
Television	41	32	50
God/Creator/another supernat force	40	32	61
Luck	39	41	56
The Internet	39	30	52
What people in power decide	36	35	47

Given the attention that young females on reserves in particular are giving to the Internet, it is interesting to note that they – along with males in the same settings – are considerably more likely than other teenagers to maintain that their lives are being influenced by the Internet.

In short, Aboriginals attending band-run schools are more likely than other teens to view their lives as influenced by *both* internal and external factors. Such a finding may be important in understanding some of the variables that both stimulate and inhibit behaviour among Aboriginal youth.



Summary Note

Aboriginal teens and other teens continue to get tremendous enjoyment from friends and family members. For everyone, the emergence of the new technological means of experiencing friendships and enjoying family members has enabled people both to initiate contacts and to stay in contact – removing old geographical barriers. While these changes have had an important impact on how Canadians of all ages can experience relationships and understand the country and world, the Internet-led technology may be having nothing less than a revolutionary impact on Canadian Aboriginal young people who are living on reserves. For many, led by young females, the Internet is providing a bridge to the rest of Canada and the globe.

Reflections and Responses

Some Important Facts

- Nothing matters more to Aboriginal teens than relationships. Community is a traditional way of life for these youth who speak of warm and involved adults in their lives. The vibrant collective nature of Aboriginal communities has been documented by many Aboriginal writers.¹² New technologies have been embraced by on-reserve youth because they extend hangout time with friends and make it possible to locate new companions in far away places.
- There is some good news about education. Teens in Aboriginal schools are more likely than other youth to claim to be highly influenced by their teachers.
- Aboriginals are ahead of other young people in some key social areas. Greater numbers place high value on family, cultural background and spirituality. Such connections may play an important role in contributing to resilience.

Some Important Responses

- ✓ Adults in positions of authority who provide a self-less presence over the long haul play a crucial role for aboriginal youth. Helpfulness, flexibility, time, generosity, humour, authenticity, and online availability are character ingredients that help gain a hearing with Aboriginal youth.
- ✓ Interactive, user-friendly digital communication is potentially a powerful, life-altering force, for all youth including those who are geographically isolated. Adults who grew up with one-way broadcast television need to understand the intergenerational implications of a confident, savvy generation of youth who are comfortable with these new participatory, digital technologies.
- ✓ We would do well to learn about Aboriginal family connectedness. Those who work with Aboriginal youth need to have a clear understanding of their inseparable link to such kinship networks.

¹²See, for example, Taiaiake 2009.

3. CANADA AND THE WORLD

Social Concerns

We asked teenagers how often they *follow the news*, as well as a number of *specific topics and issues*. Some 40% across the country say they follow the news “several times a week” or more – down from 45% in 2000. The current “daily” figure is 17%.

Aboriginals follow the news a bit less than teens as a whole, but – especially in the case of those attending schools on reserves – have similar or even slightly higher levels of interest in specific current issues than other young people.

Table 3.1. Following of News and Specific Topics

	The News*	World Events	Environmentl Issues	Canadian Politics	Afghanistan Developments
Nationally	40%	54	51	30	19
Aboriginals: <i>off-reserve</i>	35	51	49	30	25
<i>on-reserve</i>	31	56	55	37	28

*Follow the news several times a week or more; other topics – follow “very closely” or “fairly closely.”

As young Aboriginals look at life in Canada, they are far more inclined to see a large number of issues as constituting “very serious” problems than other teenagers. Such concerns are particularly prevalent among *those who are living on reserves*.

- Seven in 10 attending band-run schools note the seriousness of child abuse, teena suicide, and violence against women.
- Following close behind are the environment, racial discrimination, drugs, AIDS, and crime.
- About 5 in 10 see violence in schools, youth gangs, and bullying as “very serious” problems, along with poverty, and the unequal treatment of women.
- Even though Aboriginals were surveyed during the economic downturn, just 1 in 3 viewed the economy as a severe problem – only slightly higher than other teens who were surveyed on the eve of the recession.

Table 3.2. Social Concerns
% Viewing as “Very Serious” in Canada

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
The Environment	54	59	64
Child abuse	51	60	74
Teenage suicide	46	66	70
Racial discrimination	45	59	62
Drugs	42	59	62
Violence in schools	42	45	50
Poverty	41	44	46
Violence against women	39	50	69
Crime	38	45	60
AIDS	38	51	62
Bullying	34	41	47
Unequal treatment women	34	47	53
Youth gangs	33	44	53
The Economy	23	25	34
Aboriginal/ non-Aboriginal relations	21	53	47

In general, *Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools* are more inclined than Canadian teens as a whole to see almost all these issues as “very serious.” But their concern levels tend to be below those on reserves.

Confidence in Leadership

A solid majority of about 7 in 10 teenagers across the country maintain that they have “a great deal” or “quite a bit” of confidence in the leadership that is being given to *schools* and the *police*.

- That high level of confidence slips to about 6 in 10 in the case of the *court system*, *newspapers*, and *the music industry*, and to about 5 in 10 for *provincial government* and *federal government* leadership.
- Around 4 in 10 teens say they have high levels of confidence in the leadership being given by *religious organizations* and the *television industry*.

Table 3.3. Confidence in Leaders
 “How much confidence do you have in the people in charge of...”
 % Indicating “A Great Deal” or “Quite a Bit”

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Schools	69	70	75
The Police	67	55	**
The RCMP	**	**	58
Band Police	**	**	50
The Court System	58	44	55
Newspapers	58	52	53
The Music Industry	52	64	71
Your Provincial Government	48	44	53
The Federal Government	47	42	54
Religious Organizations	39	31	52
Television	37	32	47

Overall, *teens attending Aboriginal schools* express levels of confidence in leadership that tend to be as high or higher than other young people. *Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools* tend to exhibit confidence levels similar to non-Aboriginals, with the notable exceptions of lower levels of confidence in both the police and the courts.

We asked students who are attending Aboriginal schools about the confidence they have in the leadership being given to some activities and structures found specifically on reserves.

- More than 7 in 10 express high levels of confidence in the people in charge of *schools* and *traditional ceremonies*.
- About 6 in 10 say the same about those involved with *band councils* with close to the same proportion expressing high levels of confidence in the *RCMP*.
- Just over 5 in 10 say they have “a great deal” or “quite a bit” of confidence in people in charge of *the courts*, the *federal and provincial governments*, and *religious groups*.
- An even 5 in 10 indicate they have a high level of confidence in the *Band police* – slightly below the 58% confidence level assigned to the *RCMP*.

Table 3.4. Confidence in Leaders: Teens Attending Aboriginal Schools
 “How much confidence do you have in the people in charge of...”
 % Indicating “A Great Deal” or “Quite a Bit”

	ALL	Females	Males
Schools	75	78	71
Traditional Ceremonies	74	78	69
Your Band Council	63	62	63
The RCMP	58	58	58
The Courts	55	60	48
The Federal Government	54	54	53
Your Prov/Territorial Govt	53	54	52
Churches/religious groups	52	55	49
The Band Police	50	52	48

In general, females attending Aboriginal schools are slightly more inclined than their male counterparts to express confidence in leadership, especially the courts.

Views of People

One of the most valued interpersonal characteristics of young people is trust. We asked them for their thoughts about trust and people.

- A small number – about 5% - maintain people can *almost always* be trusted.
- Another 40% say they can *usually* be trusted.
- A further 40% feel that we *usually can't be too careful* in dealing with people.
- Close to 15% feel that we *almost always can't be too careful* when we are relating to people.

We consequently have a situation in Canada where teenagers, along with adults, put supreme importance on good interpersonal relations. Yet, they feel a need to relate to each other and to adults with caution.

Aboriginal teens share the same trepidation. Those attending off-reserve schools closely resemble non-Aboriginals in their views of people. Females who attend band schools are slightly more polarized – with some being more trustful but others being more distrustful than those in other settings.

For a number of years now, we've been asking teenagers and adults for their responses to the statement, "A *stranger who shows a person attention is probably up to something.*"

- Consistently since we first put the item to adults in 1990, some 20% have said they agree.
- In the case of teens, the agreement figure was just under 40% in 1992 and 2000. Today it has jumped to nearly 50%.

Here, female and male Aboriginals living on reserves report fairly similar responses to teens elsewhere. However, Aboriginals who attend off-reserve schools express higher levels of suspicion of "friendly strangers" than other teens – perhaps reflecting a greater sense of both visibility and vulnerability.

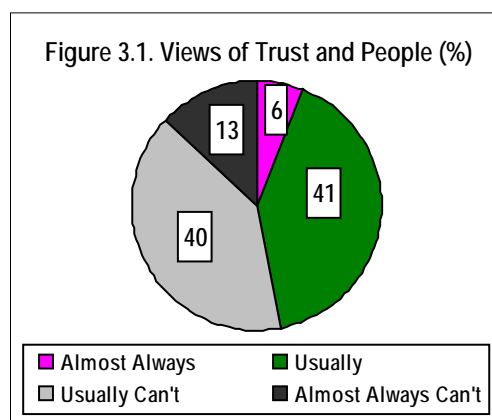
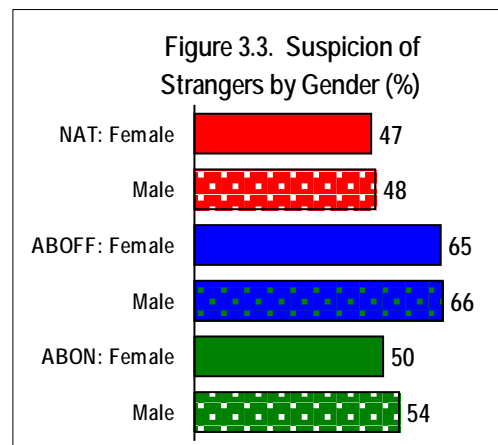
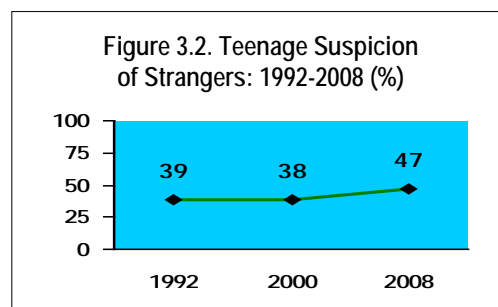


Table 3.5. Views of Trust and People by Gender (%)

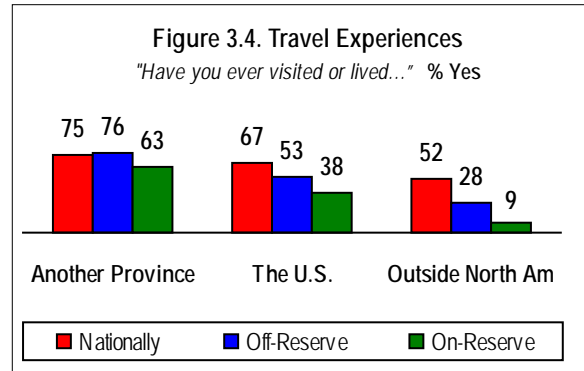
	NATIONAL		ABORIG OFF		ABORIG ON	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Almost always	6	7	9	7	15	12
Usually	38	44	31	41	29	42
Usually can't	42	37	45	35	35	34
Almost always can't	14	12	15	17	21	12



Awareness and Concern Regarding Global Issues

Teens who attend Aboriginal schools and therefore are, with few exceptions, living on reserves, *travel far less* than other Canadian teenagers.

- Close to 2 in 3 teens who live on reserves have travelled to another province or territory and just over 1 in 3 have been to the U.S. However, only about 1 in 10 have been outside North America.
- As might be expected, travel experiences are more common among Aboriginals who attend off-reserve schools.
- The highest levels of travel are experienced by other, non-Aboriginal, teenagers, many of whom were born outside Canada, and revisit the countries from which they have come.¹³

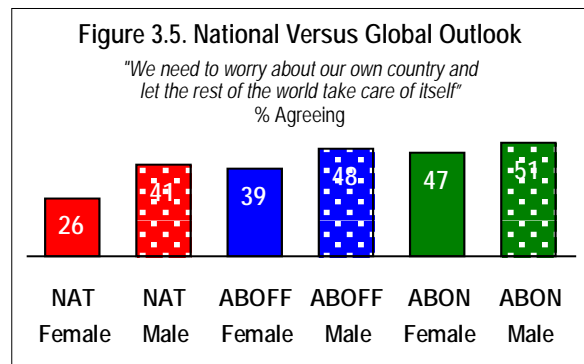


We saw that Aboriginals have similar levels of interest in a number of current national and global issues as other young people. Beyond interest, a higher proportion of teens in Aboriginal schools versus other settings *express concern* about a variety of world problems, such as global warming, human rights violations, AIDS, and overpopulation.

Table 3.6. Concern About Global Issues
"Looking at the world more generally, how concerned are you about the following?"
 % Indicating "Very Concerned"

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Global warming	46%	49	56
Human rights violations	42	46	55
Poverty	39	38	38
AIDS	37	42	51
Terrorism	27	29	35
Overpopulation	20	19	27

Yet, while they indicate higher levels of concern about many such global issues, students in Aboriginal schools are more inclined than others to feel that *"we need to worry about our own country and let the rest of the world take care of itself."* They are followed by Aboriginal teens in off-reserve schools. Here, it seems that Aboriginal concern for people elsewhere is tempered by the reality of their own widespread needs.



¹³For details on travel involving other teens born in Canada and outside Canada, see Bibby 2009:131.

Gender differences are small for this item among young people attending Aboriginal schools. However, while travel experiences differ little for teenage females and males as a whole, females – Aboriginal and otherwise – are somewhat more inclined than males to express concern about both global problems and the need for Canada and Canadians to respond.

	NATIONAL		ABORIG OFF		ABORIG ON	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
<i>Have Travelled...</i>						
Another province	76	74	75	77	66	62
Outside North America	52	52	22	34	10	8
<i>Concerned About</i>						
Global warming	40	51	44	54	50	60
Poverty	32	47	28	48	37	39

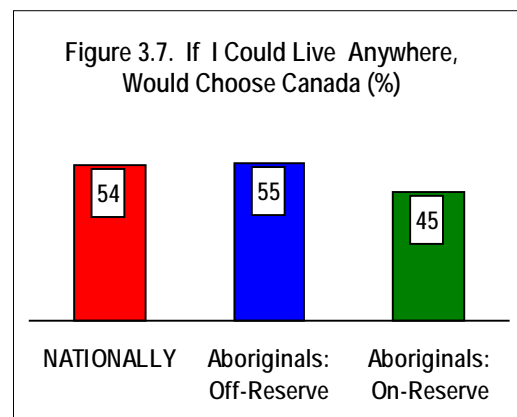
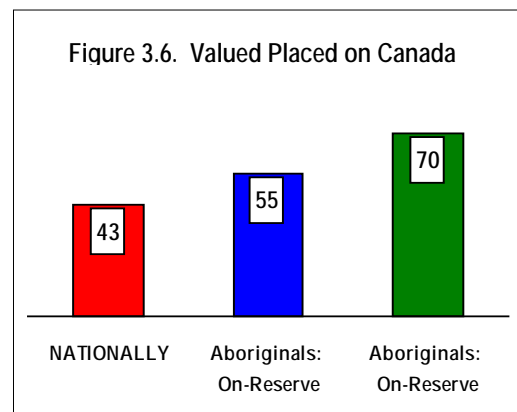
The Valued Placed on Canada

Asked pointedly, “How important is Canada to you?” some 43% of teenagers indicate the country is “very important.” Another 29% say it is “somewhat important,” 16% that it is “not very important,” and 12% that Canada is “not important at all” to them.

Some 70% of teens who attend Aboriginal schools say that Canada is “very important” to them, as do 55% of Aboriginals who attend off-reserve schools. Both levels are obviously well above the national average. This “patriotism” perhaps tied to the idea of the sacredness of one’s homeland and the place of respect given to Aboriginal veterans who fought “for the land”.

Yet, when we asked young people, if they could live anywhere, where would they choose to live, the results were quite different. While about 55% of students attending non-Aboriginal schools say they would choose Canada, only 45% of teens attending band-run schools opt for Canada. Gender differences here, as with the importance placed on Canada, are small.

- The United States is the preference of 23% of on-reserve students, various European countries of approximately another 20%, Japan and the Australia the choices of additional 3% each; varied selections make up the remaining 6%.
- What seems to be at work here is that the majority of teens who live on reserves do place a high value on Canada. Yet, for many, the quality of life is not what they want it to be.



IF COULD LIVE ANYWHERE

"...as long as I have a job it does not matter...anywhere away from the bad memories...Paris, France...not too far from home...Hollywood...stay in Canada, stay right here on the reserve...Greece or at least Saskatoon or some Big City somewhere...far away...a place where I can be successful and well-known...I don't know - I'll have to wait and see..."

Summary Note

Aboriginal young people offer many positive thoughts about Canada. They value the country and express fairly high levels of confidence in leaders. They also are more inclined than other teens to be concerned about the problems people are facing around the world.

But, Aboriginals who lives on reserves, in particular, are more likely than others to feel that there are a number of problem areas in Canada that require top priority attention. Those problems frequently are affecting them directly. It is not surprising, for example, that HIV/AIDS is a serious concern. Between 1998 and 2005, one in three Aboriginals who were diagnosed with HIV were under 30 years old, compared to just one in five non-Aboriginals. Women made up 47% of all new HIV diagnoses among Aboriginal people, compared with 21% among non-Aboriginals. The percentage of Aboriginals living in overcrowded housing is five to six times higher on reserves and in the North than in the general population.¹⁴

In the light of widespread personal and social concerns, it is little wonder that – given a choice – many young Aboriginals dream of living somewhere else.

¹⁴"Aboriginal health and well-being." 2007 *Canada Year Book*.

Reflections and Responses

Some Important Facts

- Aboriginal youth are deeply troubled by a wide range of social issues that are affecting quality of life. These issues are significantly less bothersome to other Canadian youth and reflect the present aftermath of a colonized past as well as a deeply ingrained feeling for the other. The most concerning social issues are child abuse, teenage suicide, violence against women, aids, drugs, racial discrimination and crime.
- There is some evidence that a lot of off reserve aboriginal teens have trouble with off reserve authority figures and appear to be caught between two worlds. They are neither fully assimilated nor solidly bicultural.
- Young Aboriginals take the role of warrior seriously – in keeping with a holistic understanding of a sacred homeland¹⁵ – and exhibit confidence in the community leaders of their clans, local governments and educational institutions that most directly nurture their cultural moorings. There is also great respect for the elders as knowledge and cultural keepers, which bodes well for Aboriginal youth's identity formation and the social well being of future generations.¹⁶

Some Important Responses

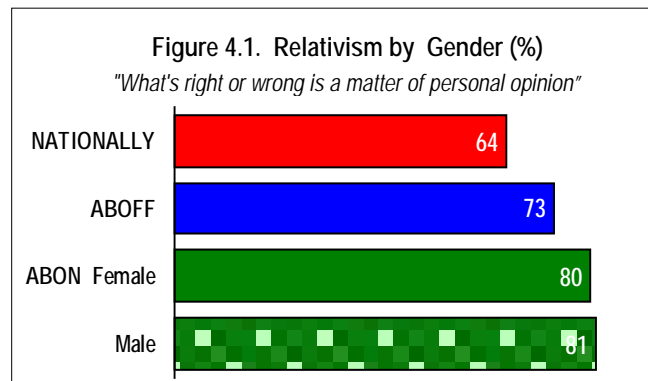
- ✓ There is an urgent need for all Canadian adults to be sobered by the seven social issues mentioned above. These are not statistics – but real youth sharing real problems to them. We need to listen to Aboriginal youth *and work with them and their mentors*. The involvement of Aboriginal mentors is a winning strategy as aboriginal youth already express confidence in them – while distrusting those they don't know. Research on best aboriginal practices that deal with these issues is also a strategic and significant part of the solution.
- ✓ Passion for childcare and earth care in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadian teens could be leveraged by their mentors via innovative twinning initiatives. Such initiatives could include the opportunity for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth to “travel with a purpose,” thereby broadening global horizons while richly maximizing multi-cultural understanding in both directions.
- ✓ Explore initiatives that involve aboriginal youth as significant contributors to society. **This will only work with intense listening.** It will also require deep connectedness, long hours of partnering, creative opportunities to use gifts, and the empowerment of Aboriginal youth to lead.

¹⁵Ross 2006: 33-34; Anderson 2001:59.

4. MORALITY, SEX, AND FAMILY ATTITUDES

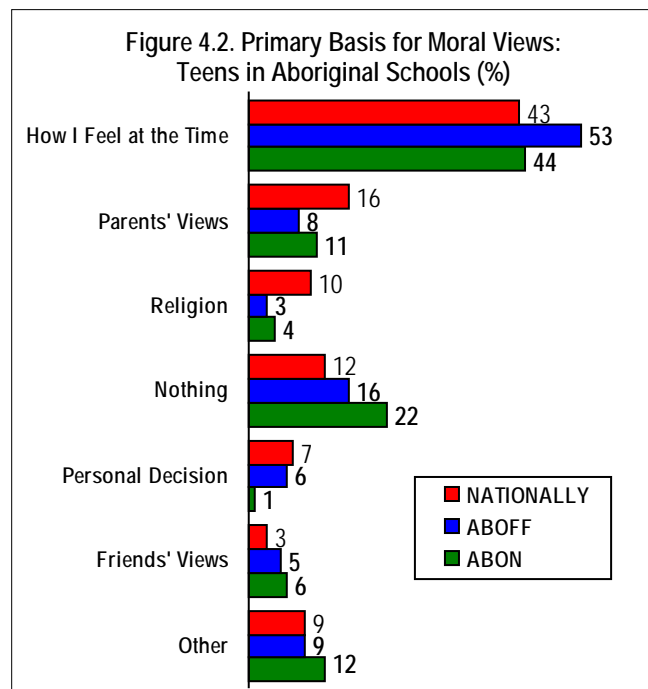
Sources of Moral Decisions

The majority of today's emerging millennial generation – like previous Canadian teenagers who grew up in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s – are inclined to see things in relativistic terms. They include Aboriginals. Some 65% of young people across Canada agree with the statement, “*What’s right or wrong is a matter of personal opinion.*” In the case of Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools, the figure is 73%. For teens attending Aboriginal schools, the figure rises to 80%.



We asked teens, “*Generally speaking, on what do you base your moral views?*” and gave them six response options, along with the opportunity to cite any other criteria that might be important to them.

The dominant response? *How they feel at the time* (43%) or a subjective, *personal decision* (7%). For around 20%, the views of *parents, friends, and others* are important. Only 10% say that *religion* is the primary basis for their moral decisions, slightly below the number who say they have *no basis* for their moral views. The rest cited *varied* sources.



Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools are more inclined than other teens to say their morality decisions are based on how they feel at the time (53%), and the least likely to be influenced by their parents' views (8%), friends (5%), and other people (1%), as well as religion (3%). Personal decision (6%) and nothing (16%) bring the “personal factors” up to around 75% – compared to 67% for other Aboriginals and 62% for teens generally.

¹⁶Deloria 1995:36, 232.

In the case of *teens attending Aboriginal schools*, how they feel at the time is cited by a similar 44% as the primary basis for their moral views. A further 22% say that their views are influenced by their parents, friends, and other significant people. But an additional 22% say that they don't really base their views on anything – well above the 10% level for other teens across the country. Just 4% cite religion.

In short, Aboriginals as a whole resemble other teenagers in claiming that their moral decisions are based primarily on their personal feelings, and the influence of some key people. But they are even more likely than others to acknowledge that their moral decisions lie primarily with themselves, especially in the case of those attending off-reserve schools.

Interpersonal Values and Behaviour

We again examined the importance that young people are giving to basic interpersonal values that make for civility.

What we found is that some 80% of Canadian teenagers say that *trust* and *honesty* are “very important” to them, while 75% place the same level of importance on *humour*. Integrity is obviously extremely important to today's teens. They also have discovered early that *humour* elevates life, making social connections more enjoyable, and tough tasks and tough times more tolerable.¹⁷

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Trust	84	81	83
Honesty	81	81	79
Humour	75	81	73
Concern for others	65	66	56
Politeness	64	70	56
Forgiveness	60	66	65
Cleanliness	59	60	66
Working hard	55	60	62

Other basic key interpersonal characteristics such as *concern for others*, *politeness*, *forgiveness*, and *working hard* are highly valued by about 6 in 10 – as is *cleanliness*.

There are few sizable differences between teens as a whole, and Aboriginals attending off-reserve or on-reserve schools.

We included a few items by way of trying to probe *behaviour beyond values*. Regarding honesty, we asked teens how they would respond if they purchased an item and realized they had been given \$10 more in change than they were supposed to receive. Would they return the money, keep it, or find their decision would depend on a number of factors (e.g., store size, knowing the clerk, expecting to shop there again). We also asked whether teenagers “approve,” “disapprove,” or “don't care either way” when someone (a) does not say “sorry” after bumping into another person, and (b) a person on occasion giving someone “the finger.”

¹⁷Bibby 2009:9.

Nationally, about 4 in 10 teens said they would return the ten dollars. The rest were divided between keeping it and feeling “it would depend.” Close to 8 in 10 said they would “disapprove” of someone not saying sorry after bumping into another person, while just under 5 in 10 “disapprove” of people, in some situations, giving someone “the finger.”

Table 4.2. A Peek At Honesty in Action (%)

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Received \$10 in Error			
Go back and return the extra \$10	38	41	34
It would depend	31	34	20
Keep the \$10 and keep walking	31	25	46
Courtesy (disapprove)			
Not saying “sorry” bump into someone	77	67	49
Sometimes giving someone “the finger”	45	32	39

Teens attending Aboriginal schools are somewhat less likely than others to say they would return the \$10 and disapprove of the missing “sorry.” Use of “the finger” troubles non-Aboriginals more than Aboriginals.

Overall, *females* – Aboriginal and otherwise – are *far more inclined than males* to say they “highly value” interpersonal traits. They also are more likely than males to say they would return the \$10, disapprove of “the finger,” and in most cases also disapprove of not saying “sorry.”

Table 4.3. Valued Interpersonal Traits by Gender
% Viewing as “Very Important”

	NAT		ABOFF		ABON	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Highly Value						
Trust	90	76	89	73	87	79
Honesty	87	74	89	74	86	73
Concern for others	73	56	79	52	61	51
Cleanliness	62	56	65	55	72	59
Working hard	58	52	61	59	65	59
Would return the \$10	44	31	51	18	38	30
Not saying sorry: <i>disap</i>	82	71	67	68	56	42
The finger: <i>disapprove</i>	51	37	40	24	44	34

Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour

At minimum, Canadians are expected to at best respect differences and at least tolerate them. The posture is something of “the Canadian way.”¹⁸

When we posed sexual attitudes in this manner, we found that *premarital sex* receives a high level of both approval and acceptance when love is involved (72%). If sex only has a “like” component, approval drops significantly.

Table 4.4. Teenage Sexual Attitudes

	Approve & Accept	Disapprove But Accept	Disapprove & Do Not Accept	Totals
Premarital Sex...				
when people LOVE each other	72%	19	9	100
when people LIKE each other	38	37	25	100
Extramarital Sex				
other than with one’s marriage partner	5	17	78	100
Homosexuality				
Sexual relations between two people of the same sex	44	28	28	100

¹⁸Bibby 2006:47.

In the case of *extramarital sex*, only 5% of teens say this is something that receives both their acceptance and approval. In fact, some 80% say they neither accept nor approve of married people having sex with other partners.

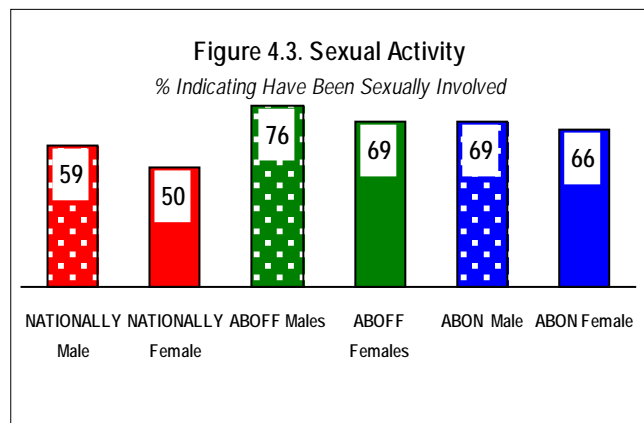
As for *homosexuality*, 44% say they both accept and approve of same-sex relations. However, another 28% of teens indicate that they are willing to accept homosexuality, even if they do not personally approve.

Table 4.5. Teenage Sexual Attitudes (%)
% Indicating "Approve & Accept"

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Premarital sex...love each other	72	82	64
Premarital sex...like each other	38	52	35
Extramarital sex	5	6	6
Homosexuality	44	54	30

Aboriginals attending *off-reserve schools* exhibit higher levels of approval and acceptance of premarital sex generally, along with homosexuality. Teens who attend *Aboriginal schools* are less likely than others to indicate that they approve of homosexuality. Teens are uniform in rejecting extramarital sex.

With respect to *actual sexual behaviour*, since the mid-1980s, we have found that a remarkably consistent, 60% of males and 50% of females have maintained that they have, at some point, been sexually involved. Aboriginals – led by males who attend off-reserve schools – are more inclined than others to acknowledge that they have been sexually involved.



Currently, some 32% of teens across the country, including 45% of Aboriginals, say that they are engaging in sex at least once a month. Involvement levels are higher for males than females (34% vs. 30%), with the difference pronounced both for Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools (59% vs. 35%) and those attending band schools (50% vs. 38%).

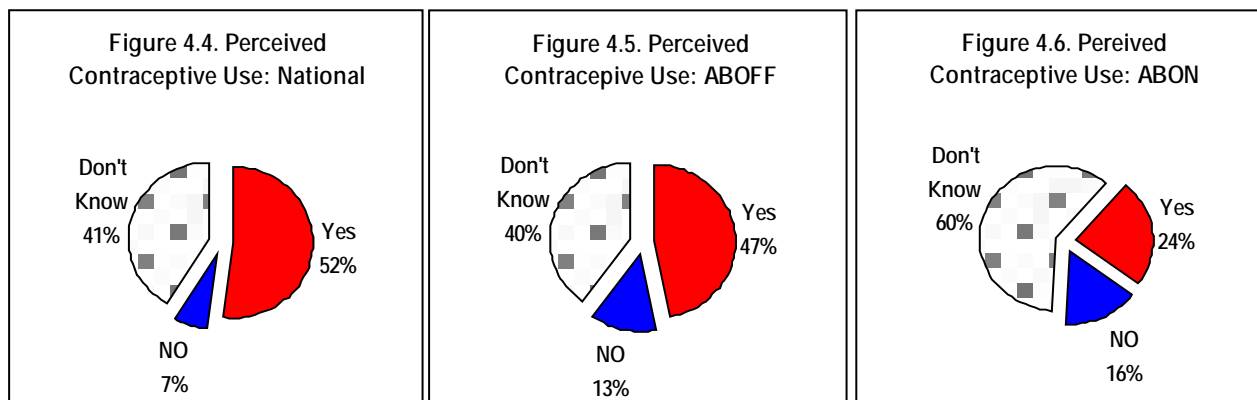
Table 4.6. Teenage Sexual Activity by Gender
"About how often do you engage in sex?"

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Daily	5%	7	7
Several times a week	9	11	9
About once a week	7	7	8
2-3 times a month	7	11	11
About once a month	4	10	9
Hardly ever	12	19	16
Never	56	35	40
Totals	100	100	100

Contraceptives

We asked our respondents, “Do most of the teenagers you know who are sexually active use contraceptives?”¹⁹

Across the country, about 5 in 10 think they do and 1 in 10 think they don't. The remainder say they don't really know. That means that, among those who feel they know, 88% maintain that, generally speaking, teens are using some form of birth control, while 12% say they are not.



Some 60% of teens living on reserves say they don't know whether or not teens who are sexually active are using birth control, compared to about 40% of other teenagers. If we base our comparisons on young people who *do* claim to know, the figures for the use of some form of birth control are as follows: nationally for everyone, 88%; for Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools, 78%; for teens attending Aboriginal schools, 60%. In all three cases, gender differences in the perception of the use of contraceptives are negligible.

Cohabitation and Parenting

Close to 80% of teenagers across the country say that they approve of *unmarried couples living together*. That level is particularly high among female Aboriginals who are attending schools off-reserve (93%), but a bit lower among males on reserves (65%).

Nationally, among all teens, just over 50% of females and males say that they approve of *unmarried couples having children*. These levels, again, are considerably higher for Aboriginal females who attend off-reserve schools, and somewhat higher for males who likewise are not attending band-run schools.

	NAT		ABOFF		ABON	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Living together	77	78	93	76	74	65
Having children	55	51	83	64	63	53

Summary Note

These highly diverse explorations of values, morality, and religion show that Aboriginal teens and other Canadian youth have many things in common. Some differences are also apparent. Aboriginals living on reserves are even more inclined than other teens to feel that moral decisions lie with the individual, rather than some kinds of external standard. They tend to hold the same values as everyone else, but are more situational in applying them – more commonly engaging in sex, more inclined to approve of unmarried couples having children. Those distinctive features are less evident among those in off-reserve schools who, removed from reserves and frequently parental ties as well, exhibit considerable moral and lifestyle autonomy.

Reflections and Responses

Some Important Facts

- In their moral decision-making, young Aboriginals, like other Canadian youth, exhibit a high level of individualism. This seems to represent a disconnect between their valuing relationships with peers, elders and others while frequently making moral choices on the basis of personal, situational feelings and factors.
- Led by those living off-reserve, many Aboriginal teenagers appear to have a casual, “live and let live” attitude towards a wide range of sexual and family structure norms.
- Extramarital relations remain taboo for Aboriginal youth and other young people, linked – it would seem – both to teachings and life experiences.

Some Important Responses

- ✓ Aboriginals teens and their counterparts elsewhere would seemingly benefit from being encouraged to balance community values with personal inclinations, not abandoning community in the course of pursuing personal happiness.
- ✓ There is a need for Aboriginal sexuality to be better understood to ensure that it is experienced in such a way that it enhances the personal and collective life of all involved.
- ✓ Aboriginal family life involves the entire clan and is experienced in ways frequently different from that of other Canadians. There is a need to appreciate family life as it is experienced by Aboriginals.

¹⁹In the Aboriginal school version, we thought an improvement on the wording was to replace “contraceptives” with “birth control.”

5. PERSONAL CONCERNS

Primary Concerns

The ranking of personal concerns by teenagers are fairly consistent among Aboriginals and others. The levels of concern about such issues, however, tend to be somewhat higher among Aboriginals – especially among those living on reserves.

The paramount personal concerns have to do with school – the *pressure to do well at school* and *what students are going to do once they finish school*.

- A number of issues are concerns for some 5 in 10 teens. They include *lack of money and time, boredom* – often associated with school since they spend so much of their time there, and a sense that *so many things are changing*. Money, boredom, and time are more commonly cited as concerns by Aboriginals than others.
- About 4 in 10 teens – and slightly higher proportions of Aboriginals – say they are concerned about the *purpose of life*. A similar proportion is troubled about not being as *intelligent* as they would like to be; here the difference between Aboriginals and others is small.
- Just over 3 in 10 report that they are concerned “a great deal” or “quite a bit” about such diverse things as their *weight, depression, inferiority feelings*, and – in the case of Aboriginals on reserves – *isolation*.
- Additional issues for just under 3 in 10 include their *family’s lack of money* – somewhat more frequently cited by teens attending Aboriginal schools than others, *height, conflict with teachers*, and *being bullied at school* – with the two latter issues more frequently mentioned by Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools than by others.

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Pressure to do well at school	75%	76	76
What going do when finish school	68	69	74
Lack of money	56	68	62
Never seem to have enough time	56	54	56
Boredom	53	61	66
So many things changing	50	57	69
Wondering about the purpose of life	45	51	55
Not as intelligent as would like to be	42	44	46
My weight	35	37	36
Depression	35	45	50
Feeling I am not as good as others	35	38	36
Loneliness	32	34	37
Isolation	**	**	34
Your family’s lack of money	29	30	37
Conflict with teachers at school	23	32	**
My height	21	23	30
Being bullied at school	15	21	15

In short, money, boredom, change, purpose, and depression are cited by larger proportions of Aboriginals – led by those on reserves – than other teenagers across the country.

Asked in open-ended fashion who they turn to when they face serious problems, teens in general mention *family* first, followed by *friends*. Together, they account for 73% of the key sources for everyone, 67% in the case of Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools and 68% for those attending band-run schools.

Some 23% of Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools indicate that they either rely on themselves or no one – higher than the 16-17% level for other teens.

Teens on reserves are somewhat less likely to turn to friends, but more likely to turn to family members and other significant adults.

Table 5.2. Resources When Facing Problems (%)
"When I face a serious problem, I turn to..."

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Family	35	29	38
Friends	31	34	22
Friends & family	7	4	8
Self	10	11	11
No one	6	12	6
Music	3	3	2
God	2	<1	3
Counsellors	2	4	2
Others	4	3	8
Totals	100	100	100

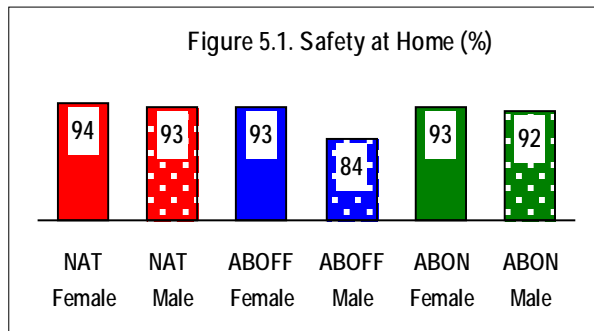
"...I Turn to..." - Reflections from Aboriginals on Reserves

"...my mom and my dad...music and somewhere I can be alone...my parents and my spiritual ways...my head to work things out...my iPod...my friends...the closest person to me - my brother...no one, because I am a problem-solver...my skate board...music or my mom...poetry...my room...kids' help-line...my tears or my friends...Elders...my METAL music...my peers and weed...someone I trust...my grandma...God, because you can trust him with everything and anything..."

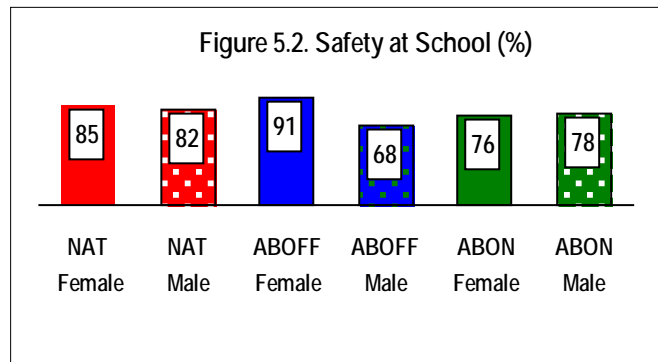
Teens at Risk

There are some young people who seem to be particularly at risk when it comes to their personal well-being and safety at home, school, or elsewhere.

Nationally, 94% of females and 93% of males say that they feel *safe at home*. Those levels are similar for Aboriginals, with the notable exception of males who are attending off-reserve schools, where the figure drops to 84%. It will be recalled that the home situations for teens in this category are extremely varied.



With respect to school, some 85% of female teens across Canada say they *feel safe at school*, as do 82% of males. Such positive sentiments are held by female Aboriginals who attend off-reserve schools, but not by their male counterparts – where the “safe at school” sentiments are expressed by only 68%. On reserves, the levels are slightly below those across the country, at 76% females and 78% for males.



These findings suggest that, when it comes to school, a significant number of Aboriginal males and – on reserves – Aboriginal females as well, feel a measure of apprehension about their personal safety.

That consternation appears to be warranted. Asked about the extent to which various problems have been experienced by a close friend at school or elsewhere, Aboriginals – led by those living off-reserve – are consistently more likely than other teenagers to say they have friends who have had such difficulties.

- The problems include *being bullied, attacked at school, being victims of gang violence; having had alcohol or drug problems, having been severely depressed, having attempted suicide, and having been physically or sexually abused.*
- Clearly many Aboriginals, especially those who are living off-reserve, are finding life difficult, with a disproportionately high proportion at risk.

Table 5.3. Extent to Which Problems Have Been Experienced by a Close Friend

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Has an alcohol or drug problem	51%	70	59
Has been bullied at school	48	66	43
Has been severely depressed	46	57	50
Physically attacked at school	32	55	41
Has attempted suicide	31	49	44
Physically abused at home	27	41	30
Has been sexually abused	24	37	30
A victim of gang violence	19	31	29

Such widespread concern for personal safety is also disproportionately high among Aboriginal adults. Statistics Canada (2006) victimization data for 2004 reveal that 4 in 10 Aboriginals 15 and over reported being victimized at least once in the previous twelve months – well above the 28% figure for non-Aboriginals. They also were almost four times more likely to be victims of spousal violence.

Views and Use of Drugs

From the time we started carrying out national youth surveys in the mid-1980s, we have found that teenagers have acknowledged that they have ready access to illegal drugs if they want to use them. Today is no different. Some 90% who claim to know say that it either is “not very difficult” or “not difficult at all” to obtain drugs if they want to use them. The figure is only slightly lower for teens on reserves (84%).

Table 5.4. Accessibility of Drugs According to Teens Who Claim to Know (%)

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Extremely difficult	5	4	6
Somewhat difficult	6	8	10
Not very difficult	38	31	36
Not difficult at all	51	57	48

Among Canadian teens as a whole, the use of marijuana or hashish is actually down over the past decade – from 37% in 2000 to a current level of 32%, use of other illegal drugs from 14% to 12% over the same time period.

There also has been a significant decline in cigarette smoking since 2000, from 37% to 23%. Alcohol use also is down, from 78% to 71%. Gender differences are small, the largest being for marijuana use, where there is a six-percentage-point differences between male and female users (35% versus 29%).²⁰

Drug use among Aboriginal teens tends to be higher than that of the general population. There is one exception: the use of alcohol by teens living on reserves is slightly *below* that of the national average.

Table 5.5. Teenage Drug Use

% Indicating Regular or Occasional Use

	NAT			ABOFF			ABON		
	ALL	F	M	ALL	F	M	ALL	F	M
Use marijuana or hashish	32	29	35	49	49	49	46	45	48
Use other illegal drugs	12	10	13	16	14	17	20	22	18
Smoke cigarettes	23	23	22	43	46	41	53	54	52
Drink beer, wine or other alcohol	71	70	72	79	80	79	65	64	66

²⁰Bibby 2009:74-76.

Trouble and Encounters with the Police

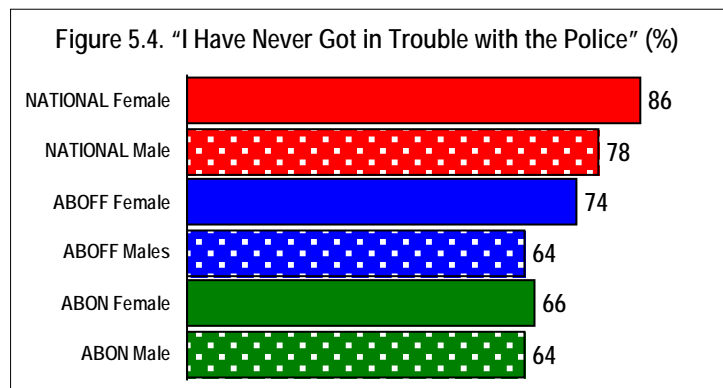
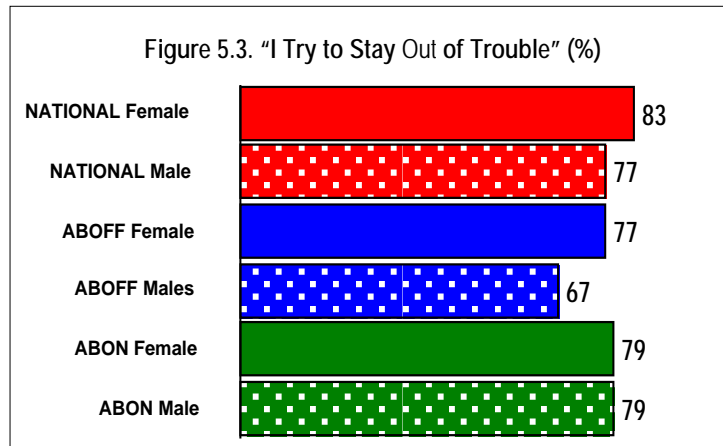
The vast majority of teens across the country point out that they “*try to stay out of trouble.*” Such an outlook is slightly more prevalent among females than males. For some reason, it is a bit less characteristic of Aboriginal males who attend off-reserve schools – perhaps something of a psychological defence, given that a good number acknowledge that they themselves have been victims of discrimination and bullying, and have experienced conflict with teachers.

These off-reserve males, along with other Aboriginal males, are more likely than other teens to

acknowledge having had *encounters with the police*. In fact, almost 1 in 3 indicate they have had had run-ins with the police, compared to 1 in 5 non-Aboriginal males.

Here again, females tend to have less problems with the police than males, although the difference is very slight in the case of Aboriginals on reserves. This latter situation may to some extent reflect the presence of Band Police, and greater familiarity and interaction with Aboriginal teens.

Statistics Canada (2009b) reports that in 2007-2008, Aboriginal adults accounted for 22% of admissions to sentenced custody, while representing only 3% of the Canadian population. These findings for teenagers hopefully point to more positive adult experiences for Aboriginals.



Overall Self-Image

In the face of acknowledged difficulties in living life, including drug use and encounters with the police, it is interesting to see that the self-images of Aboriginal young people, regardless of where they are living, are remarkably positive.

- They are just as likely or nearly as likely as other teenagers to say that they are *good people* with a number of *good qualities*, who are *well-liked*, *competent*, *good-looking*, and *have lots of confidence*.
- Anywhere from 94% to 71% maintain that such characteristics describe them “very well” or “fairly well.” Differences between Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools and band schools are generally quite small.

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
“I am a good person”	94	94	91
“I have a number of good qualities”	94	93	86
“I am well-liked”	93	91	86
“I can do most things very well”	79	80	82
“I am good-looking”	77	74	71
“I have lots of confidence”	68	69	74

If we put the six items together and construct a self-image index, what we find is that the proportion of Aboriginals on and off reserves who score “high,” “moderate,” and “low” on such an index closely mirror the proportions of the Canadian teenage population as a whole.

Such “mirroring” also applies to gender: the self-image scores of Aboriginal females and males closely resemble those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
High (6-5)	74	73	72
<i>Females</i>	71	71	67
<i>Males</i>	78	76	78
Moderate (4-3)	20	18	20
<i>Females</i>	23	19	23
<i>Males</i>	17	16	16
Low (2-0)	6	9	8
<i>Females</i>	6	10	10
<i>Males</i>	5	8	6

Summary Note

These findings document the fact that Aboriginal young people face many of the same issues as others as they move through their teenage years and approach adulthood.

But the findings also document the reality that, for many Aboriginals – including those who attend schools off-reserve – life is sometimes difficult. Money, rapid change, the lack of social support, discrimination, conflict, and fear for one’s safety are issues that can put young Aboriginals in a disadvantaged position. Drug use and problems with the law can further serve to lower their quality of life.

The causal role of economics in all this is underlined by highly respected Aboriginal expert Jean Lafrance of the University of Calgary. He reminds us that “poverty is a major contributor to family distress. There seems little doubt,” he says, “that children who are born into poor families, whose lives begin in an environment of deficiency and whose parents are preoccupied with the stresses of being able to provide decent accommodation, food, and security are at far greater risk of experiencing negative outcomes than children whose parents are financially secure.”²¹

Yet, somewhat remarkably, young Aboriginals exhibit the potential for resilience, not only in retaining relatively positive self-images through their teen years, but in holding on to hopes for a better future – our final topic that we will turn to next.

Reflections and Responses

Some Important Facts

- In the area of personal concerns, the most striking differences between Aboriginal youth on reserves and other Canadian young people are boredom, so many things changing, wondering about life’s purpose, and depression.
- Aboriginal teens off reserve, especially males, are often caught between two worlds and seem to be more at risk than any other group.²²
- Yet self-esteem levels of Aboriginal teens are similar to those of other teens.

Some Important Responses

- ✓ Boredom, lack of purpose, and depression point to the need for encouraging and instilling meaning, purpose, and hope. They also signal the need for a much wider range of recreational, sporting and cultural options for young people.
- ✓ There appears to be a need for particular attention to be given to elevating the lives of Aboriginal males.
- ✓ Ongoing priority needs to be given to Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools.

²¹Lafrance 2009:8.

²²Castellano, et al 2001:123.

6. ASPIRATIONS

General

As Canadian teenagers look to the future, they are dreaming and dreaming big. We asked them about their expectations – not their *hopes*, but what they *expect* to experience.

- More than 9 in 10 expect to pursue careers, and close to 9 in 10 say they expect to get the job they want when they graduate. Notice – they are not talking about finding work; they are anticipating that they will be able to find the kind of job that they want.
- These days – in fact for a number of years now – the financial experts have been telling us that, in a growing number of parts of the country, young people cannot afford to own their own homes. Nonetheless, no less than 97% of teenagers say that they expect to experience such a reality.
- And for decades prognosticators have been telling us that “this will be the first generation in Canadian history that will have to settle for less than their parents.” Young people still don’t believe the prophets: 81% maintain that they will be more financially comfortable than their parents.
- Some 57% add that they *don’t* think they will have to work overtime in the process.

Table 6.1. Employment and Economic Expectations (%)

% Who Indicate They Expect to...

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
Pursue a career	95	91	87
Get the job I want when I graduate	87	80	84
Own my own home	97	96	95
Be more financially comfortable than my parents	81	80	80
Have to work overtime in order to get ahead	43	56	57

Aboriginal young people share these lofty expectations of Canadian youth – varying only in being a little bit less sure they will get that job they want and in being more inclined to think they will have to work overtime. But overall, differences in expectations are minor.

Education

Since the mid-1980s, when we first started monitoring teenagers, educational aspirations have increased significantly. In 1987, 57% expected to go to university. As of 2008, the figure has increased to 76%. About 88% felt they would finish high school; now that’s the minimum expectation of close to 100%.²³

Aboriginal educational aspirations are not as high – but they still are very high.

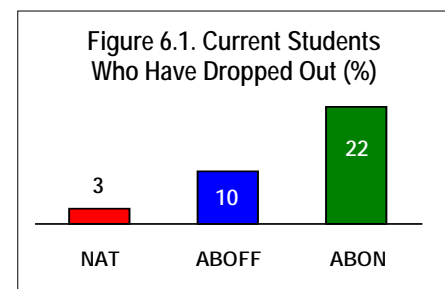
- Despite the fact that about 25% of those attending band-run schools say their mothers or fathers did not graduate from high school, almost all maintain that they themselves will. Moreover, about 55% of females and 45% of males say they expect to go to university.

²³For details, see Bibby 2009:197.

Table 6.2. Educational Aspirations
"How much education do you expect you will eventually get?" (%)

	NAT		ABOFF		ABON	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Graduate from university	73	62	47	43	45	32
Some university	7	10	10	10	11	15
Complete vocational	13	16	19	21	9	11
Some vocational	3	5	10	7	2	8
High school	4	7	13	16	32	33
Less than high school	<1	<1	<1	3	<1	1

- Such aspirations are in keeping with a general increase in Aboriginal educational levels. Between 1981 and 2001, the proportion of Aboriginal women, 20-24, who had not completed high school dropped from 61% to 40%, in the case men 64% to 47%. As of 2001, Aboriginal women were more likely than men to have a college diploma or university degree.²⁴
- Many Aboriginal young people are showing tenacity in trying to further their educations: 10% of those who attend off-reserve schools dropped out at some point, as did 22% of those in band-run schools; for currently-enrolled Canadian high school students as a whole, the drop-out figure is only 3%.



Careers

No less than 74% of teenagers across the country agree with the statement, *"Anyone who works hard will rise to the top."* They include 76% of Aboriginals who attend off-reserve schools and – 89% of those who attend schools on reserves! We saw earlier that 62% of teens who attend Aboriginal schools say that working hard is "very important" to them – as do 60% of other Aboriginals and 55% of teens as a whole.

As a result, it is not surprising that a majority of Aboriginal young people, led by those living on reserves, believe that hard work can lead to the realization of their educational and occupation dreams – helping to explain why 84% expect to get the jobs they want when they graduate.

It is worth noting that, when asked if they expect to eventually live on a reserve, teens currently attending band-run schools are almost equally divided between those who say

"Yes" (52%) and "No" (48%) However, whether they eventually live on or off of a reserve has little effect on their economic, educational, or career aspirations.

Table 6.3. Employment and Economic Expectations by Where One Eventually Expects to Live: Teens on Reserves (%)

	ALL	On A Reserve	Off A Reserve
	Own my own home	95	95
Pursue a career	87	87	85
Get the job I want when I graduate	87	87	80
Be more financially comfortable than my parents	80	80	80
Attend university	52	51	54

²⁴"Aboriginal peoples," 2007 Canada Year Book.

The general rankings of the characteristics of what is seen as “a good job” are fairly similar for Aboriginals and other young people. The majority of teens think a good job is one where the work is interesting and provides feelings of personal accomplishment.

There are some differences: pay is ranked slightly higher by those attending Aboriginal schools than others; being laid off is not as much of a concern for Aboriginals as other teenagers.

Table 6.4. Characteristics of a Good Job (%)
% Viewing as “Very Important”

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
The work is interesting	83	79	70
Provides feelings accomplishment	76	72	67
Is a chance for advancement	67	66	61
It pays well	65	64	71
People are friendly and helpful	64	62	64
Adds to other people’s lives	58	62	56
Is little chance of being laid off	56	48	41
Allows me to make most of the decisions myself	50	48	59

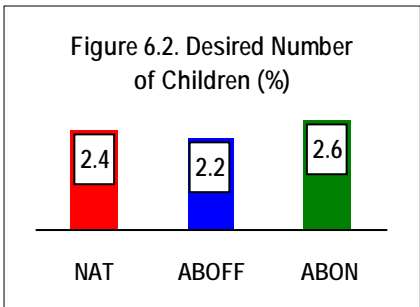
Family Life

An interesting and important “add-on” to family life that characterizes the latest emerging generation is the inclination for some 3 in 10 teens across the country to say they expect to live with a partner but not necessarily marry the person. Nonetheless, some 9 in 10 indicate they expect to get married at some point in their lives. Once they are in committed relationships – marital or otherwise – a further 9 in 10 say they expect to stay with the same partner for life. Almost everyone also expects to have children.

Table 6.5. Family and Career Expectations (%)
% Who Indicate They Expect to...

	NAT		ABOFF		ABON	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Live with a partner but not marry	30	32	45	48	50	49
Get married at some point in your life	89	91	79	83	80	81
Stay with the same partner for life	90	85	77	75	67	66
Have children	94	95	91	91	94	94

Aboriginal teens tend to differ from other Canadian teenagers in being more inclined to plan to cohabit but not marry, and being a little bit less likely to plan on getting married at some point. They are considerably less likely to feel that they will have life-long relationships with the same partner – especially in the case of young people who live on reserves.



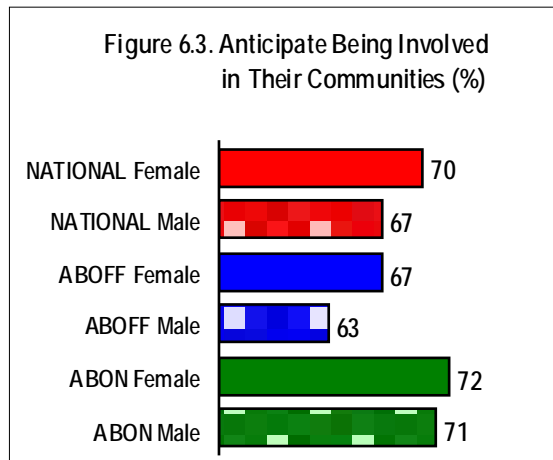
They are, however, just as likely to anticipate having children, with those attending band-run schools thinking of having slightly more than others. The pattern is not new: between 1996 and 2001, Aboriginal women had an average of 2.6 children over their lifetimes, versus 1.5 for non-Aboriginal women.²⁵

²⁵“Aboriginal women face a paradox,” 2007 Canada Year Book.

Involvement in Their Communities

Some 68% of teenagers across Canada say that, in the future, they expect to be involved in their communities. Differences between females and males are small.

In the case of Aboriginals, a similar level of 65% of those who attend off-reserve schools indicate that they anticipate being involved in the communities in which they live, with the figures similar for females and males. For teens who are living on reserves, the figure is a slightly higher 72%, with little difference between females and males.



It is interesting to note that a noteworthy difference in anticipated community involvement exists for teens currently living on reserves who plan to eventually live on a reserve versus those who do not.

- Some 58% of those who expect they *will not* live on a reserve see their futures including involvement in their communities.
- Among those who think they eventually *will* live on a reserve, the figure is 84%.
- In both scenarios, females and males are just as likely to envision being involved or not being involved in their communities.

Summary Note

Teenagers, Aboriginal and otherwise, are looking to the future with high expectations. In analyzing the results of the national survey as a whole, I have suggested that it is almost as if teens have something like “a hope chip” imbedded.²⁶ Regardless of what they have experienced at home and in the early years of their lives, the vast majority look to the future with great hope. They firmly believe that, even if things have not been what they could have been to date, if they work hard and persevere, they can turn things around – educationally, financially, and relationally.

Aboriginals, like teens more generally, have high hopes when it comes to their futures. What’s intriguing is that, while as many as one in two seem to feel that they are going to have to leave their reserves in order to launch many of their dreams, another one in two appear to believe that their dreams eventually can be fulfilled through their returning to their reserves – indeed, in large part will be fulfilled precisely because they can share in the life of their communities. One seems to be pursuing it all by leaving – the other by returning.

Reflections and Responses

Some Important Facts

- Almost all young Aboriginals believe that they *individually* are on a journey towards a bright future complete with financial stability, work satisfaction, educational success and meaningful relationships, including partners and children, and involvement in their communities. All of this is good news.
- Aboriginal teens off-reserve are just as optimistic as their counterparts on reserves.
- Aboriginal youth not only bring optimism to the table as they face the future, but – as we saw earlier – the vast majority also believe in the importance of hard work.

Some Important Responses

- ✓ The optimism of Aboriginal teens needs to continue to be met with resources, led by educational and employment opportunities.
- ✓ Those resources need to continue to be provided for Aboriginals who live on reserves and off-reserves.
- ✓ The high relational hopes and expectations regarding future family life also points to the need for people in a wide range of institutional settings to do everything they can to enable Aboriginal youth – and other young people – to experience the best in family life that is possible.

7. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Beliefs

Similar to their counterparts dating back to the mid-1980s, close to 95% of teens tell us that they have raised the so-called “*ultimate questions*” about the purpose of life, whether or not there is a God, why is there suffering in the world, and what happens after death. Aboriginals are among them.

Some 8 in 10 teens subscribe to the idea that the *central goal in life is to be happy*. Yet beyond this life, close to the same proportion maintain that there is *life after death*.

More than 6 in 10 say they believe in *God* or a higher power – what many Aboriginals refer to as “the Creator.” Close to the same proportion believe that such a supreme being *cares about them* personally and *expects them to be “good to each other.”*

Teens also hold a wide range of additional supernatural beliefs.

- Almost 60% maintain that *miraculous healing* sometimes occurs.
- More than 50% acknowledge that they themselves have *spiritual needs*.
- Just under one-half think we can have *contact with the spirit world*.
- And some 4 in 10 claim that they have felt the *presence of God*.

Young people who are living on reserves and attending band-run schools are more likely than other teens – including Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools – to hold all of these beliefs, including the idea that the main thing in life is to be happy.

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON
The central goal /main thing in life is to be happy	81	81	88
In life after death	75	75	82
God exists*	67	64	78
God cares about you personally	62	62	71
God expects us to be good to each other	62	56	76
Miraculous healing sometimes occurs	57	63	67
You yourself have spiritual needs	54	58	72
We can have contact with the spirit world	46	66	67
You have felt the presence of God	39	39	46

**“God or a higher power” was listed with each God reference in the items here that appeared in the main PTC08 questionnaire; in the Aboriginal sample supplement, “God or a Creator” was used.

²⁶Bibby 2009:189ff.

We asked teens who are attending Aboriginal schools about some additional beliefs that are associated with Aboriginal spirituality. Such beliefs are endorsed by a majority of Aboriginal young people.

- We found that 85% believe that “*all things have a spirit,*” with just under 80% agreeing that “*all forms of life are connected to each other.*”
- Close to 8 in 10 affirm the *importance of gathering for traditional ceremonies*, while 7 in 10 agree that “*prayers of thanks*” should be offered daily “*to the Creator.*”
- Just over 6 in 10 say that *the Medicine Wheel* helps them to understand their lives.

Table 7.2. Some Specific Beliefs: Teens in Aboriginal Schools
“Do you believe...”
 % Indicating “Yes, I definitely do” or “Yes, I think I do”

All living things have a spirit	85%
It’s important for us to gather for traditional ceremonies	82
All forms of life are connected to each other	77
Prayers of thanks should be made to the Creator every day	68
The Medicine Wheel helps me understand my life	64

Practices

Beyond beliefs, we also have found that some 30% of teenagers who attend Aboriginal schools maintain they *pray privately* at least once a week – exactly the same level as that of teenagers more generally across the country. Among off-reserve teens, the figure is a slightly lower 24%. Some 13% of young people across Canada say they *read the Bible or some other type of sacred Scriptures* at least once a week, slightly above the 10% level for Aboriginals both on and off reserves.

With respect to *organized religion*, about 1 in 3 Canadian teenagers *attend services* at least once a month, and just under that proportion indicate they are receiving high *levels of enjoyment* from their involvement in religious groups. The attendance levels of Aboriginals are slightly lower, yet their enjoyment levels are slightly higher. Presumably they are more likely than non-Aboriginals to enjoy services once they are there, but are not quite as likely to be there on a regular basis. Gender differences are small. It also may be that many see religion as far more than mere service attendance.

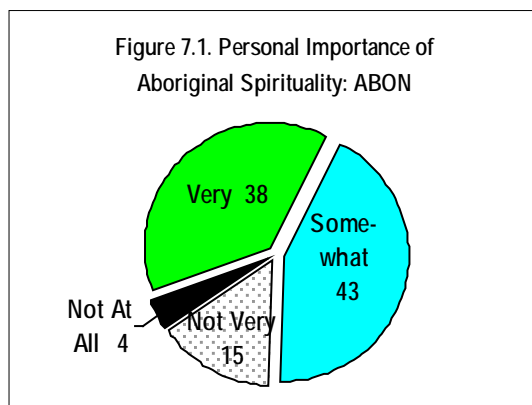
Table 7.3. Organized Religion

	NAT	ABOFF	ABON		
			ALL	F	M
Attend: <i>monthly-plus</i>	33%	19	25	25	25
Enjoyment: <i>high</i>	28	26	40	43	38
Anticipate					
<i>Wedding ceremony</i>	84	80	78	82	75
<i>Funeral</i>	83	80	82	87	75

Yet, led by females, Aboriginals are just about as inclined as others to say that they anticipate turning to religious groups in the *future for rites of passage*, such as weddings and funerals.

These general findings on beliefs and practices lead to the important question of how young Aboriginals are dealing with the rebirth of Aboriginal spirituality, in contexts where Christianity in general and Catholicism specifically have taken root over time.

Asked directly, “How important is Aboriginal spirituality to you,” 38% of teens living on reserves say that it is “very important” and another 43% maintain that it is “somewhat important” – some 80% in all. The remaining 20% or so either view it as “not very important” or “not important at all.”



- As we saw at the beginning of the report, about 2 in 4 teens on reserves who were asked to clarify the relationship said they *value both* Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity.
- Around 1 in 4 say they *value the former but not the latter*, 1 in 20 say they *value Christianity but not Aboriginal spirituality*.
- Most of the remaining 20% or so say they *do not highly value either*.
- Females (84%) are somewhat more inclined than males (77%) to value both or either.

Table 7.4. Views of Aboriginal Spirituality & Christianity (%)
Teens Attending Aboriginal Schools

Value...	ALL	Females	Males
Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity	47	53	39
Aboriginal spirituality but not Christianity	29	28	31
Christianity but not Aboriginal spirituality	5	3	7
Neither	18	16	21
Other	1	<1	2

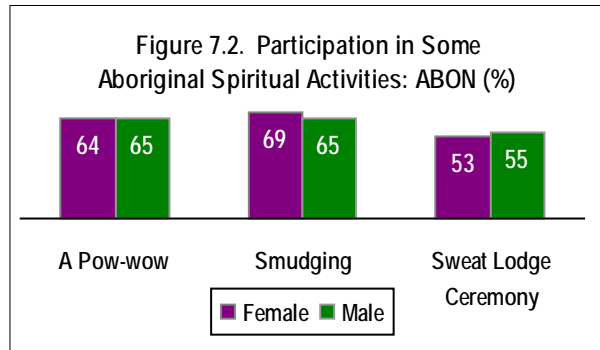
So it would seem that about 80% of Aboriginals who attend reserve schools value Aboriginal spirituality, while some 50% value Christianity – with an overlap of around 30%.

That 80% figure is corroborated by some 75% - led by females - indicating (a) that spiritual teachings are important to them, and (b) that they have a high level of confidence in the people in charge of traditional ceremonies. No less than 70% say that the wisdom of the Elders is “very important” to them; another 20% indicate that it is “somewhat important.”

Table 7.5. Aboriginal Spirituality: Teens Attending Aboriginal Schools (%)

	ALL	Females	Males
Aboriginal spirituality: important	81	86	76
Spiritual teachings: important	76	80	70
High level of confidence in people in charge of traditional ceremonies	74	78	69
Wisdom of Elders: very important	70	76	64

About 65% report that they have participated in a pow-wow – a social gathering honouring Aboriginal culture. About the same proportion of teens claim they have participated in a smudging – a purification ceremony using smudge sticks that produce a type of incense and over one-half have been part of a ceremonial sauna known as a sweat lodge ceremony.



Clearly, Aboriginal spirituality is both valued and practiced by significant numbers of young people.

“When you think of Aboriginal spirituality, what comes to mind?”

Beliefs & Teachings

“...our grandparents, our ancestors’ teachings...giving thanks to the Creator for what he gave us...respecting everything... our own religious beliefs that we’ve had long before the white man arrived in North America... it is what you believe...forgiveness, healing, trust, Love, Peace, happy really happy...respecting mother earth, traditions, culture...”

Culture

my culture, my language... the culture and history and language.....your community comes together as a family...your language, teaching others to know where they have come from...culture, values and traditions...culture, belief, prayers, ceremonies... going home and going hunting...

Ceremonies

Sundance, sweat lodge, 4 directions, Eagle whistle, etc. ...ceremonies, pow-wows, round dances... ceremonies, and learning our way of life...sweat lodges... drums, Sweetgrass, singing, and medicine... eagle feather, drums, ceremonies, regalia...an elder smudging us...Animals, the Creator, Feathers, Dancing, Praying, Singing...beautiful clothing with bright beads and feathers...pow-wows, Sitting Bull...the creator, sweats and traditional ceremonies...eagle in the smoke while elders talk in the teepee... medicine man doing something for communities...

Other Thoughts

...being respectful of others... I don’t get it... I think about when our ancestors die, how they’ll always be there to guide us as our angels...I immediately think of my spirit and how he is keeping me safe, and how he is helping me sustain from drugs and alcohol... when I was younger I always used to do dry meat and sew moose hide, take nature walks, and other things... ignorance, and futile preservation of a dying culture...I think about how it works - do they walk about wondering if they’re still living or do they live up in the sky with the stars or northern lights... I haven’t really thought about it... I’m trying to learn about aboriginal spirituality...”

Values and Other Correlates

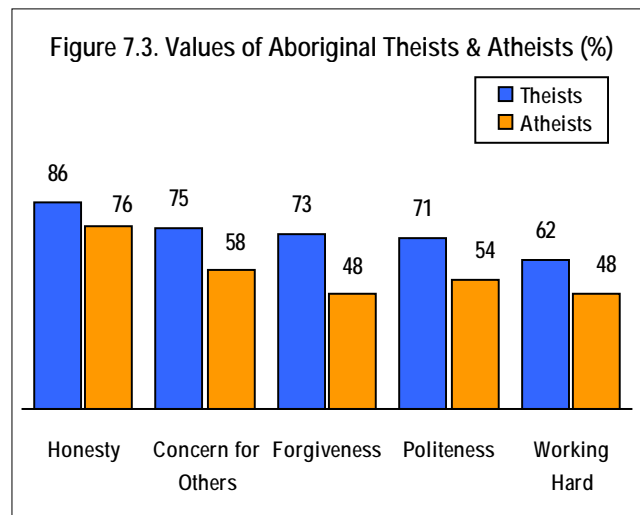
An important question is whether or not religion and spirituality are associated with some positive characteristics for Aboriginals as well as for others. For example, does religion or Aboriginal spirituality contribute to the holding of positive interpersonal values such as honesty and concern for others? Among Aboriginals specifically, is the valuing of traditional spirituality associated with personal well-being? Does it contribute to the valuing of Aboriginal culture more generally – to social solidarity and social well-being?

A number of items included in the survey allow us to pursue some of these questions.²⁷ Three measures we have just examined can readily be used as independent variables to explore a number of correlates of religion and spirituality among Aboriginals. The first is the *theism* variable, the second the *personal importance of Aboriginal spirituality*, and the third the extent to which teens place *importance on Aboriginal spirituality, Christianity, and neither*.

The survey findings show that Canadian teenagers who hold a firm theistic position are more inclined than teens who say they are atheists²⁸ to place importance on a number of interpersonal traits. They included trust, honesty, concern for others, controlled.

The pattern is also found among Aboriginal youth. To the extent that teens who attend band-run schools believe that God or a Creator exists, they are consistently more likely than those who refute such an idea to claim to place a “very high” level of importance on honesty, concern for others, forgiveness, politeness, and hard work.

Again, it is needs to be emphasized that it is not a matter of atheist young people not valuing such traits; indeed, many do. However, on balance, theistically-minded teens are *more likely* to place high value on these interpersonal characteristics.



²⁷In this section, since the primary purpose of the analysis is not description but rather an examination of religion and spirituality's correlates, the unweighted N's are being used. For Aboriginal spirituality, the N's are: "Very NB" 350, "Somewhat" 308, "Not NB" 121 (total 779). For Aboriginal spirituality/Christianity, the N's are: both 315, Aboriginal only 230, neither 107 (total 652). Alberta, of course, is overrepresented; at this point no blatant distortion is apparent.

²⁸That is, those who say they "definitely" believe in God (or a higher power or a Creator) and those who say they "definitely do not" hold such a belief. For details, see Bibby, 2009:170-173.

The role of religion and spirituality in contributing to the valuing of such traits can further be seen when we make use of two additional measures – the importance teens attending reserve schools give to Aboriginal spirituality and the simultaneous importance they place on *both* Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity.

- Those who say that Aboriginal spirituality is “very important” to them, followed by those who see such spirituality as “somewhat important” are more inclined than others to see each of these interpersonal traits as salient.
- In addition, those who value *both* Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity are slightly – but consistently – more likely than those who value Aboriginal spirituality *but not* Christianity to place importance on these characteristics. In both cases, the levels of endorsement exceed teens who say they *value neither* Aboriginal spirituality nor Christianity.

Table 7.6. Values by Importance of Aboriginal Spirituality

	Very NB	Somewhat NB	Not Very NB
Honesty	82%	76	66
Forgiveness	73	63	50
Working hard	68	61	56
Concern others	62	52	43
Politeness	62	49	38

Table 7.7. Values by Importance of Aboriginal Spirituality & Christianity

	AB Spir & Cty	AB Spir Not Cty	Neither
Honesty	80%	76	73
Working hard	68	60	64
Forgiveness	67	65	55
Concern others	63	52	48
Politeness	60	52	45

These are important findings – suggesting that, for Aboriginals living on reserves, religion and spirituality are at minimum among the sources of values that make for positive interpersonal life. Both together and separately, Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity are associated with an enhanced appreciation for such values.

Obviously there can be many sources of values that contribute to civility. What these findings indicate is that religion and spirituality are among them.

Personal and Social Well-Being

The valuing of Aboriginal spirituality alone, along with the valuing of both Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity, are also associated with the endorsement of a wide variety of characteristics that contribute to personal well-being.

- They include the valuing of success, a good education, humour, cleanliness, intelligence, and creativity.
- Interestingly, viewing Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity as important does not, however, translate into any noteworthy differences in sexual behaviour, smoking, or marijuana use. In fact, teens who say they value Aboriginal spirituality – if anything – are somewhat *more likely* to engage in all three types of behaviour than those who do not.
- Both religion and spirituality, however, are associated with somewhat more positive self-images and personal happiness.

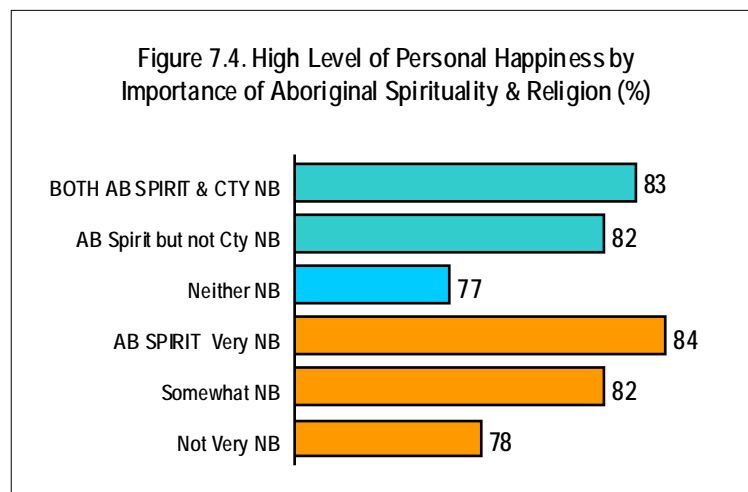
In short, for young Aboriginals living on reserves, religion and spirituality appear to be contributing to values that have the potential to influence interpersonal life, as well as play a role in the development of feelings of personal worth and happiness. However, their net effect on behaviour such as sex, smoking, and marijuana is no greater and perhaps even somewhat less than the net impact of other factors.

Table 7.8. Person Well-Being Values by the Importance of Aboriginal Spirituality

	Very NB	Somewhat NB	Not Very NB
Success	82%	70	62
A good education	85	76	74
Humour	75	72	60
Cleanliness	73	66	55
Intelligence	72	60	45
Creativity	64	52	45
Never engage sex	33	35	38
Never smoke	43	41	58
Never use MJ	49	44	55
Self-Esteem: Hi	75	74	62
Mod	18	20	25
Low	7	6	13

Table 7.9. Personal Well-Being Values by the Importance of Aboriginal Spirituality & Christianity

	AB Spir & Cty	AB Spir Not Cty	Neither
Success	77%	79	65
A good education	83	80	73
Humour	75	73	70
Cleanliness	68	70	61
Intelligence	68	69	52
Creativity	59	59	48
Never engage sex	34	30	34
Never smoke	44	44	45
Never use MJ	47	44	50
Self-Esteem: Hi	71	77	68
Mod	21	19	24
Low	8	4	8



As would be expected, teens in band-run schools who place a high value on Aboriginal spirituality also place very high value on the wisdom of Elders, along with spiritual teachings. That's also the case when Aboriginal youth also value Christianity.

- Family life and – in particular – one's cultural heritage tend to be valued more highly among teens who place importance on spirituality and religion than other young people. Canada is also valued a bit more.
- What also stands out is the inclination for Aboriginal teens who see spirituality and religion as important to have more friends and to be more positive than others about school.

Together, these findings point to the fact that religion and spirituality are associated with an increase in social integration and social well-being. Students who value Aboriginal spirituality and frequently Christianity as well are more inclined than others to have respect for Elders and teachings, family life, and cultural heritage. They also are more apt to have a good number of close friends and to have positive views and feelings about their school experience.

An interesting footnote finding is that Aboriginal teens who plan to eventually live on a reserve are considerably more likely than others to place high value on Aboriginal spirituality. Also valuing Christianity does nothing to reduce the inclination to eventually live on a reserve.

Here again, religion and spirituality appear to contribute to a sense of Aboriginal identification.

Table 7.10. Social Well-Being Values by the Importance of Aboriginal Spirituality

	Very NB	Somewhat NB	Not Very NB
Wisdom of Elders	87%	70	43
Spiritual teachings	75	72	60
Family life	89	80	78
Cultural heritage	84	46	24
Canada	71	66	64
Friends: 4-plus	82	79	68
Confidence school	83	74	58
Joy from school	81	73	61
Future: reserve	61	43	36

Table 7.11. Social Well-Being Values by the Importance of Aboriginal Spirituality & Christianity

	AB Spir & Cty	AB Spir Not Cty	Neither
Wisdom of Elders	80%	78	49
Spiritual teachings	50	46	20
Family life	87	82	76
Cultural heritage	70	69	25
Canada	72	67	64
Friends: 4-plus	78	85	70
Confidence school	82	74	63
Joy from school	79	74	69
Future: reserve	55	48	38

Receptivity

Apart from current levels of involvement, teens were asked to respond to the statement, *“I’d be open to greater involvement with religious groups if I found it to be worthwhile.”*

- Nationally, 38% of those currently attending services less than once a month said they would be, as did 65% of monthly-plus attenders.
- Among teens on reserves, the less than monthly figure was 56%, for those off-reserve, 36%.
- In addition, 70% attending Aboriginal schools said they are open to spiritual teachings, if they could likewise find them *“to be worthwhile.”*

Clearly large numbers of young people have not said good-bye to religion and spiritual teachings. But they need to find that such pursuits touch their lives in meaningful ways.

Table 7.12. Openness to Greater Involvement and Spiritual Teachings
“...if I found it/them to be worthwhile”

	ATTEND SERVICES	
	< Monthly	Monthly+
Greater involvement		
ALL	38%	65
On reserve	56	73
Off reserve	36	77
Spiritual teachings		
On reserve	70	70

Summary Note

Young Aboriginals, led by those who live on reserves, exhibit higher levels of supernatural belief and a greater inclination to value spirituality – especially in its Aboriginal expressions – than teenagers as a whole. While most value Aboriginal spirituality, the majority do not distance themselves from Christianity. On the contrary, over 50% who live on reserves continue to identify with the Christian faith.

Religion and spirituality are more than only beliefs and practices for the vast majority of Aboriginals. Their interpersonal values, personal lives, and ties to their families, friends, school, and community are influenced by what they believe, practice, and value. What's more, significant numbers are open to greater participation – if they can find that such involvement has an impact on their lives. At minimum, most can be expected to participate in group activities and to surface when they require key rites of passage.

For many if not most, religion persists.

Reflections and Responses

Some Important Facts

- Spirituality is ingrained in Aboriginal identity and cultural retention. Aboriginal teens, therefore, are eager to encounter the intergenerational interaction needed to understand and express their spirituality.
- The comments of Aboriginal youth reflect themes taught by the Elders including gratefulness, respect, forgiveness, trust, healing, beauty, community and joy.
- There are significant differences between the values of Aboriginal youth who are atheist and theist. There are also significant differences in the values of those who value either Aboriginal spirituality or Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity, and those who value neither.

Some Important Responses

- ✓ The holistic role that spirituality plays in Aboriginal culture needs to be understood by those who interact with Aboriginal young people.
- ✓ A much clearer understanding is needed of what Aboriginal youth have in mind when they speak of spirituality and spiritual needs.
- ✓ Religion and spirituality influence how young Aboriginals live. The positive features of that relationship need to be better understood and nurtured.

CONCLUSION

The Overall Picture in National Context

At a United Nations conference on Aboriginal Policy Research held in Ottawa in 2006, a prominent official, Elsa Stamatopoulou, stated in her closing address, “Unless Indigenous peoples themselves participate fully and effectively in data collection,” subsequent efforts to develop “wise policies, including public resource allocations,” will be built on “a fragile foundation” and “likely be incomplete, baseless, or irrelevant.”¹

Recognizing the importance of such participation, we have sought Aboriginal advice in carrying out this survey supplement and given considerable effort to ensuring that the voices of young Aboriginals are heard.

As we listen carefully to them and to the voices of other young people across the country, a number of similarities are readily apparent. But so are some important differences. Many of the differences contribute to quality of life disparities, and need to be addressed. Let’s sum things up.

Similarities

- **Valued goals.** Aboriginal young people tend to have similar goals as other teenagers, with friendship and freedom at the top of their lists - but exceeded slightly by family life and getting a good education.
- **Sources of enjoyment.** As with teenagers everywhere, Aboriginals see friends and music as their key sources of enjoyment. But those on reserves also are more likely to say that they receive considerable enjoyment from brothers, sisters, and grandparents.
- **Daily, weekly, and monthly activities.** They are virtually the same, led by friends, music, television, and computers pretty much every day; computer games (especially for Aboriginals), reading, working on music, partying in a given week; movies (less for Aboriginals), sports events, and some gambling (less so for non-Aboriginals) every month. Cell phones, text messaging, e-mails, Facebook, and YouTube are slightly less prevalent on reserves but still common, particularly among females.
- **Sources of influence.** Family background, willpower, and parents are seen as the key sources of influence for all teenagers. Aboriginals are somewhat more inclined to also give credence to other adults they respect along with their teachers, and - on reserves - television and the Internet, along with God, luck, and what people in power decide.
- **Following the news.** Levels are similar with reserve Aboriginals slightly more inclined to say they follow specific events and issues than other teenagers.

- **Moral relativism.** Teens - led by Aboriginals and, in turn, those residing on reserves - lean toward a relativistic view of morality. The no. 1 criterion for moral decisions is how an individual feels at the time. That said, there is considerable consensus re: the importance of traits such as trust, honesty, concern for others, forgiveness, and working hard. Still, moral subjectivity appears to be greater among Aboriginals than others.
- **Self-images.** Aboriginals express self-images that are about as positive as other teens.
- **Aspirations.** Fuelled by the belief that hard work leads to success, Aboriginals have aspirations that are similar to others when it comes to employment and financial success. Fewer, however, expect to attend university, marry, or stay with the same partner for life.

Differences

- **Culture.** Teens attending band-run schools are almost all First Nations individuals who were born in Canada. Nine in 10 live on reserves and virtually all speak both English and an Aboriginal language. Some 40% have traditional names.
- **Home situations.** Only about 1 in 3 Aboriginal teens have parents who are married to each other, compared to some 2 in 3 Canadian teens as a whole. As a result, approximately 5 in 10 Aboriginal young people are living with both parents, versus 7 in 10 teenagers across the country. About 20% of Aboriginals who live on reserves and off reserves are living with other relatives, friends, or foster parents, compared to about 5% of teens nationally.
- **Parental education.** Just over 30% of teens attending reserve schools have a mother or father who has completed post-secondary degrees or diplomas, compared to 40% of Aboriginals attending off-reserve schools, and 65% of all Canadian teens.
- **Family income.** Teenagers everywhere are inclined to view their family incomes as average or above. However, Aboriginals living on reserves are less likely than other teens to see their family incomes as above average.
- **Religious identification.** Aboriginal youth differ from others in citing Aboriginal spirituality as their no. 1 religion - a claim made by 1 in 2 who attend band schools and 1 in 4 who attend off-reserve schools. The next most widely-cited religion is Catholicism (1 in 10 on-reserve Aboriginals, 1 in 4 off-reserve students). Comparable proportions of Aboriginals and teens generally - around 30% or more - indicate they have no religion.
- **Confidence in leaders.** Aboriginals attending band-run schools are more likely than others to express confidence in federal and provincial leaders, along with the music industry, television, and religious organizations. They also accord a slightly higher level of confidence to the RCMP than Band Police forces. Off-reserve Aboriginals express a lower level of confidence in the courts than other teens.

¹ Cited in White, Beavon, and Spence 2007:xi.

- **Canada as one's choice of residence.** Although Aboriginals on reserves are more likely than young people elsewhere to play a high value on Canada, they also are less likely to say that, if they could live anywhere, they would choose Canada. In part that's because they are more inclined than other young people to feel a large number of social issues are "very serious."
- **Sexual attitudes and behaviour.** Aboriginal youth who attend off-reserve schools hold more liberal attitudes toward premarital sex and homosexuality than others. Behaviourally, Aboriginals acknowledge higher levels of sexual activity than teen as a whole, and lower levels of contraception use – particularly on reserves.
- **Cohabitation and parenting.** Approval of unmarried couples living together is highest among Aboriginal females attending off-reserve schools. Approval of having children without being married is higher among Aboriginals than others - and is particularly high among non-reserve teenagers.
- **Personal concerns.** While the personal concerns of Aboriginals and other young people are similar, most tend to be more pervasive among Aboriginals both off and on reserves. Money, depression, and conflict at school are particular off-reserve problems; on reserves, boredom, change, purpose, depression, and money are key problems. Drug and alcohol use, violence at school, suicide, and gang violence are more prevalent among Aboriginals than others. So are encounters with the police – even though the majority of Aboriginals, and other teens, say they try to stay out of trouble.
- **Religious beliefs.** Aboriginal young people on reserves are more inclined than others to hold diverse supernatural beliefs relating to topics such as God and a Creator, ethics, life after death, and healing.
- **Aboriginal spirituality.** Some 80% of Aboriginals attending reserve schools maintain that Aboriginal spirituality is important to them, yet some 50% indicate that they also value Christianity. Aboriginal spirituality, alone and in concert with Christianity, tends to have positive personal and social correlates, but is not related to lower levels of sexual behaviour or drug use.
- **Residence plans.** Aboriginals currently living on reserves are almost equally divided between those who plan to eventually reside on a reserve and those who do not.

What this extensive "portrait in context" reveals is the fact that, contrary to widely-held stereotypes, Aboriginal young people – both on reserves and in communities across the country – are very much like other Canadians their age. They share most of the same values when it comes to what they want out of life and how they think people should relate to each other. Their sources of enjoyment are very much the same, as they turn to friends and family, music and television, cell phones and computers, sports and reading to enjoy relationships and enjoy life.

Many of their personal concerns are also the same, led by the pressure to do well at school and the need to anticipate what they are going to do with their lives. Issues including the shortage of money and time, so many things changing, their height, weight and looks, relationships, conflict at school and home, feelings of loneliness, depression, and inferiority – all of these things are felt to varying degrees by teenagers regardless of whether they are Aboriginal or Caucasian or something else, whether they live in a big city or live on a reserve.

Canadians teens, Aboriginal and otherwise, also share many common dreams. They want to find good jobs when they graduate, own their own homes, be more financially comfortable than their parents, have a good life-long relationship complete with kids, have a measure of involvement in their communities, and be spiritually fulfilled. Many Aboriginals think they can experience those things living on a reserve; others think they will need to live somewhere else.

But the survey findings also document some very real issues that are making life difficult for Aboriginals – that are standing in the way of their knowing optimum living now and may well jeopardize the realization of their hopes and dreams in the decades to come. A few such potential barriers to full participation in Canadian life can briefly be highlighted.

- **The educational levels of their parents** are typically much lower than that of other Canadian adults, putting them at a serious economic and aspirational disadvantage.
- **Significant numbers are not being raised and supported by both parents, meaning that other adults – notably aunts, uncles, and grandparents – share in the teen-raising task, in keeping with kinship norms.** However, that is neither easy nor always effective.
- **A disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth are acknowledging that they are experiencing some significant concerns and challenges.** For example, many who are attending off-reserve schools say they are concerned about the lack of money, depression, bullying, and conflict with teachers. Many who attend band-run schools report that they are troubled about boredom, so much change, the lack of a sense of purpose, depression, and their families' lack of money. In addition, drug and alcohol abuse, school and gang violence, suicide attempts, and encounters with the police are more prevalent among Aboriginals than others.

Somewhat remarkably, Aboriginal teenagers are exhibiting very positive self-images, are indicating that they are happy, and are certainly hopeful. Most believe that if they put in the effort and work hard, they can accomplish just about anything.

In short, resilience, hope, and determination abound.

The Immediate Future

This documentation of where Canada’s Aboriginal teens are at this point in time relative to their counterparts in the rest of the country underlines the paradox of commonality and disparity. Teenagers have much in common. In the case of Aboriginal youth, they share so much with typical Canadian teens.

But they clearly are disadvantaged, and require much in the way of tangible resources and informed game-plans if their willingness to work hard and their inclination to think big are going to result in their realizing their dreams for a life that typically is an upgrade from what their parents experienced.

Jean Lafrance makes an important observation with respect to health and health resources that has much wider applicability. “Not only are Aboriginal people starting from a disadvantaged position with respect to the more obvious determinants of health,” he says, but “they are also disadvantaged in terms of access to the types of health generating programs and services often taken for granted in mainstream communities.” Lafrance writes that the “history of pernicious poverty has left a legacy of people who are wounded in their souls, and communities that are fragmented and divided.” He adds, “At the very least, we need to ensure Aboriginal communities a level playing field in terms of economic security, decent housing, and supportive communities.² In a very important new book, he lays out specific steps needed to enhance Aboriginal families.³

Dan Beavon and Jerry White, in their recent book, *Aboriginal Well-Being: Canada’s Continuing Challenge*, maintain that “Aboriginal issues will clearly present Canada with some of its most complex challenges in the twenty-first century.” They ask, “Will this century be the one where we finally address the issues of poverty, lack of educational attainment, poor health, and social problems that beset Aboriginal peoples? Or will it be one that replicates the past, maintains the status quo, and condemns the next generation of Aboriginal children to a life of mediocrity, suicides, substance abuse, and poverty?”⁴

Perhaps one of the most poignant findings from the national survey is that 70% of Aboriginal teens who are attending reserve schools say that they “highly value” being Canadians. Yet, if they could live anywhere in the world, only 45% would choose Canada.

We have to do much more to close that indicting gap.

²Lafrance 2009:7, 8, 9.

³Lafrance 2011.

⁴White, Beavon, and Spence 2007:5.

Final Thoughts

Terri-Lynn Fox & James Penner

In keeping with the desire of their elders, we can do a lot to raise the level of well being experienced by Aboriginal millennials. We therefore propose the following immediate next steps combining the efforts of all Canadians, Aboriginal adults, policy makers and people working directly with Aboriginal youth.

Next Steps for All Canadians

- Recognize that this report is a conversation with real teens dealing with real life situations. Let your heart be moved to joy, sadness, fear, and anger by the human stories behind the numbers.
- Become sensitized to Aboriginal culture and open to traditional ways of being and knowing. Continue to engage in direct dialogue with Aboriginals in places where misunderstanding arises or persists.
- Get to know and appreciate Aboriginal youth within your realm, assisting them to discover and launch their deepest aspirations.
- Become an advocate for Aboriginal millennial youth, learning from them and encouraging them to find their valued place in the Canadian mosaic. For community leaders, educators, landlords and employers, this includes welcoming Aboriginal youth into your private sphere through genuine hospitality.
- Support initiatives that address structural issues affecting Aboriginal communities and their youth. Look for allies and build coalitions with people of good will to address key Aboriginal issues. Go to places in society where decisions are being made and engage in the planning process. Sow seeds, incubate ideas and be vigilant so that stake holders act responsibly on behalf of Aboriginal youth.

Next Steps for Aboriginal Adults

- Be encouraged. There is much to celebrate in this document, starting with the valued place that Aboriginal youth place on their culture and the intergenerational trust they have for their elders and community leaders.
- Be a pole of stability for Aboriginal youth. In an advanced capitalist society it is easy for adults to stay forever young since consumption keeps the economy strong. Yet adults can consciously choose to step up and “be the answer they themselves are looking for.” According to Erik Erikson, ego satisfaction at the end of the lifecycle is directly linked to developing the younger generation in one’s adult years.

- Increase advocacy capacity by becoming bi-cultural yourself. Pro-social outcomes happen for Aboriginals that can comfortably navigate between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world and thus bring benefit to Aboriginal youth.
- Continue to mobilize the community to dialogue on the most pressing social issues for youth in local communities. Positive results can happen by bringing stakeholders together (e.g., in town hall settings) that intentionally shine a light on issues, identify root causes, create prevention strategies and outline safety plans.
- Continue to utilize the wisdom of elders and community resources. So much of what is needed is already present within Aboriginal communities. Solutions will continue to creatively emerge by leveraging community resources, involving youth and families, seeking assistance where needed and listening to the wisdom of elders.
- Continue to view Aboriginal youth as the resource that they are. An ideal community values the gifts youth bring, including their insights, labour, political involvements and creative talents.
- Continue to pursue social justice for those without voice. Clearly some situations where Aboriginal youth find themselves are unacceptable. Passionate advocates can help youth out of vulnerable situations, gain access to needed resources in isolated settings and ensure community ties and culturally sensitive services for youth off of reserves.

Next Steps for Policy Makers

- Continue to promote ventures that offer all Canadians a deeper appreciation of Aboriginal history and culture including curriculum initiatives that educate the next generation.
- Continue to support initiatives that combat issues affecting Aboriginal youth such as sexism and racism. (e.g., Sisters of Spirit – the Ottawa based group raising awareness about Canadian native girls and women who have disappeared.)
- Combat issues such as boredom and delinquent activity by increasing accessibility to educational, technological, recreational, and creative arts resources and personnel where Aboriginal youth are presently experiencing isolation and disadvantage.
- Continue to support employment initiatives both on and off reserves which are crucial to Aboriginal youth successes and their sense of well being.
- Continue to encourage post secondary funding and transitional programming where needed to ensure Aboriginal student success in vocational and university settings.

Next Steps for People Working Directly with Aboriginal Youth

- Continue to validate the experiences of disadvantaged youth and their families. Compassion means “to suffer with.” This involves listening deeply to human suffering prior to linking youth and their families to formal services and informal networks of support.
- Continue to explore creative ways to add value to Aboriginal families and communities recognizing the role healthy environments play in allowing Aboriginal youth to discover their full potential.
- Continue to coach Aboriginal youth in ventures that steer them towards meaningful education and significant work. In our fast moving culture this involves discovering that learning needs to be lifelong and satisfying work involves following one’s heart and accessing allies on the journey. It also involves youth discovering where their own personal passion and service to the community and world more broadly intersect in creative and joy filled ways.
- Understand how empowerment works. The only one who can truly empower is the one who has been marginalized themselves. For those who wish to assist in such a situation, the role is a delicate one of coming alongside, brainstorming options and encouraging the discovery of significant avenues of social involvement, political action, spiritual resourcing and community connectedness.
- Revitalize adult rites of passage. Explore ways to bring youth into full participation into the adult life of the community by recover traditional ways and create new ways to recognize and celebrate the maturation of youth.

The Project Teen Canada Project has provided Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth an unprecedented opportunity to share their realities and aspirations with Canadian adults. In many ways, as Aboriginal youth shared, their conversation highlighted the aftermath of a colonized past that deeply affected their caregivers and communities and is now affecting them. However, this interaction with Aboriginal youth has also uncovered significant signs of revitalization.

Our hope is that Canadians will read this report and gain a newer, deeper understanding of Aboriginal youth and come away with a new appreciation for this hopeful, resilient up and coming generation. Our belief is that the healing will continue and the elder’s prayers for a revitalized reality for their youth will be realized.

The Last Word

Terri-Lynn Fox

What do these findings, which have been encapsulated in this document, mean? Can they, are they, symbolic to the people that have provided this much needed insight with words? Can we, have we, fully *valued*, *respected*, and *understood* the insights of these young Aboriginal people?

The responses herein also reflect a unique worldview. One needs to be cognizant of the life-world of Aboriginal youth and context the data mirrors. The life-world of Aboriginal youth IS different than that of mainstream Canadian youth due to their ancestral heritage and specific cultural traditions; yet these two groups of youth do share some similarities. The language of each Aboriginal – First Nations, Métis, or Inuit – group will dictate their worldview due to “the lens with which they see the world around them.” Moreover, the English language can sometimes “lack” symbolism or significance in/to Indigenous peoples and languages, especially when “conversing and sharing” ceremonial rituals, connection to the environment, and the significant symbolism of connection (or some might feel “disconnection”) to Creator.

Whilst we anticipated answers and insights where Aboriginal youth were concerned, more questions arose for me as both a researcher and as a First Nations individual. As a consequence, I’m hopeful that this will be a foundational document to build upon where Aboriginal youth’s perspectives are concerned. Their ideas and aspirations, tribulations and triumphs, and belief in values and traditions are integral to the health and well-being of who they are now, and as Canada’s future leaders in whatever realm that may be.

I do not want to add any more statistics that have already been gathered (and that which may or may not be specific to Aboriginal youth), from previous documents that are magnanimous in volume. Further, some might view these volumes as “wordy” and without meaning. What I want to do, in the hope that it will bring real life to the forefront, is share the learned experience of who I am as a First Nations woman and mother, having experienced life on-reserve as a young person, and now, experiencing life as a PhD student.

A depiction of an Indigenous world-view; of a teenage life-world today...what does that mean? What constitutes priorities for this cohort? How can we, as adults – *parents, educators* (within a classroom setting and outside those parameters), *family members* which includes extended kin and those whom we deem as loving, supportive and understanding for young people today, learned individuals (includes academic knowledge, and yes, elders and seniors), *professionals* and *analyzers* support, and strive to grasp teenage life-world today? This document is sacred for young people; it will be a teaching-guide for those individuals who interact with children; and it is foundational for future curriculum and program development.

How might we begin to understand where the teachings begin for this specific group? In any culture, socialization begins at home, with cultural teachings, and with clan/community. When we teach and interact with our young, certain aspects are integral for individual growth, balance, and collective continuity.

Some authors provide examples of how balance can be achieved; with each distinct First Nations (Indigenous) group adhering to these specific values. Rupert Ross⁵ expands on Catellano Brant and his associates' explanation of the *ethic of non-interference* as an integral quest for balance in an Aboriginal milieu. *Non-interference* is respect for others' wholeness, totality, and knowledge. Ross writes, "It is up to the child to observe constantly and carefully, to study entirely on their own." We limit our children; we have do's and don'ts in our everyday life (home, school, sports groups, church groups, peer-groups)...what can they do without being punished? Without thinking they must be rewarded somehow? What constitutes right and wrong? Is it culturally-sensitive? Does it carry the same meaning from one First Nations (Aboriginal) group of people to the next?

Another highly respected academic, Leroy Little Bear of the University of Lethbridge, says that "wholeness is like a flower with four petals.... When it opens, one discovers strength, sharing, honesty, and kindness – together these four petals create balance, harmony, and beauty."⁶ Yet again, there is significance and symbolism of balance, and when we share and model these aspects to our young, they learn these good ways.

Further emphasizing the importance of achieving balance, Jean Graveline draws on educator Gregory Cajete in writing that exemplary Indigenous education...

*prepares individuals for self-actualizing themselves, fulfilling their human potential, enlivening their creative spirit, and finding their personal meaning, power, and what in earlier times Indian people called medicine. Healing oneself is a prerequisite for helping others.*⁷

⁵Ross 2006:19.

⁶Littlebear 2000:79.

⁷Graveline 2002:14.

How astounding it would be if young Aboriginal people were taught this each and every day! The teaching and knowing of one's own *medicine* – of balance, harmony, beauty, non-interference, and petals of a flower – how grand teenage life-world would be!

Speaking from the heart involves passion. I hope that what I've written grasps even an ounce of what my heart wants to share with readers, young and old alike! When I give presentations to various audiences, even though I use power-point presentations, I ALWAYS end with heart-felt tears...because of who I am as a First Nations person. Elders have shared with me that it is because "you speak your truth when you talk from the heart; you are passionate about what you believe in; you are being REAL while relaying specific information, knowledge, and ideas about various topics/issues related to First Nations people."

I am thankful and honored to have worked with Dr. Reg Bibby and James Penner. We brainstormed ideas, learned from the other, and worked as a collective on this Aboriginal part of the Project Teen Canada survey. I pray that each Aboriginal youth *wears* and *walks in their moccasins* with humility, honesty, and a sense of empowered identity and balance of who they are as Aboriginal people. Wear your moccasins proudly – as you are distinct and sacred. Maybe allow others to "wear" your moccasins so as to gain an inkling of your world-view; help make others a pair if the situation arises! Envision a balanced and harmonized future for all, yet live each day while you employ the teachings of your ancestors.

Thank you to all the youth who filled out the survey; all the other Aboriginal youth who are eagerly waiting, we'll get to ya soon!

All my relations,

Terri-Lynn Fox - PhD Candidate, Blood Tribe member

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