NAVIGATING AT A CROSSROADS: 
THE ROLE OF SUBSISTENCE CULTURE IN THE SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING OF DENA’INA 
ATHABASCAN YOUTHS IN ALASKA

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2013
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In loving memory of

Dr. Sandra Jane (Cote) Shaw
and
Lena and Fred Cote,

each of whom shared generously with all who crossed their paths a wealth of kindness, humor, respect, resilience, and an enduring willingness to learn from life, and whose immeasurable love and support made this work possible.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

_When you practice gratefulness, there is a sense of respect toward others._

- *The Dalai Lama*

The long and winding process that culminated in this thesis has cultivated more gratitude and respect in my heart than I can express here. To begin, I am indebted to the brave and tenacious people that came before me and charted a path for the scholarship that I could follow. Without the efforts of those who struggled for children’s voices to be considered important enough to listen, this work would not have been possible. My committee members—Drs. Jill Korbin, Larry Greksa, Janet McGrath, and James Spilsbury—have provided valued support in the form of wisdom, guidance and understanding. I am especially grateful to Dr. Jill Korbin for her unending counsel, caring, and commitment to the project and to me.

In Alaska, Sarah McConnell, Joan Tenenbaum, Kerry Feldman, Joel Hard, Davin Holen, and countless others were kind mentors and gentle consuls as I learned to navigate the complex social and natural landscapes as a newcomer. Drs. Denise Dillard, Vanessa Hiratsuka, and Renee Robinson, Julia Smith, Jennifer Ingram, and other colleagues at Southcentral Foundation have supported me in multiple ways, taught me much, and earned a lasting place in my heart.

Throughout the journey, I have been blessed with a cadre of friends who provided immeasurable encouragement, wit, and countless reminders that I am not now and never will be alone, even on the long, steep climbs; Diane Hirshberg, Lexi Hill, Corrie Whitmore, Adrienne Fleek, Rebecca Himschoot, Karla Kral, Jane Gibson, Michelle Eder, Heather Lindstrom, Connie Thomson, Jill Yarnot-Motz, Amy Sayer, and Kevyn Jalone—thank you, sisters.

My homegrown sister, Risa, and sister-in-law, Sharon, have been tireless cheerleaders and trail buddies, and words can’t say it. Doug Witt, trusty travel companion, thank you for always being interested and caring enough to ask, to listen and to share with genuine intent. Sweet Sandi Jane—my first best friend, mentor, playmate and inspiration extraordinaire—you taught me firsthand what it means to learn from children, to respect their wisdom, and to integrate their lessons. I hope you’re dancing in the stars, ma mère. Tim Peltier is a champion, for whom I am more grateful each day and whose exquisite combination of intelligence, humor, and compassion lights my path, makes me want to go another mile, and gives me faith in the finish line.

To the youths and families of Nondalton, Alaska, who allowed me into your community, homes, and lives, thank you from the bottom of my very grateful and respectful heart for sharing a piece of your story. I hope I listened well and told it right.
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Abstract

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Assimilation policies and practices of past centuries systematically distanced Alaska Native peoples from traditional activities that sustained them for centuries. In the late 20th century, however, a renaissance of indigenous cultures emerged across the Americas that turned attention to the role of cultural activities in modern societies. At the same time, critical youth studies increasingly considered children as active agents in social life. Such research is particularly relevant and timely in contexts of rapid social change such as rural Alaska, where global influences increasingly permeate local lifestyles and indigenous youths are charting new courses to adulthood.

This ethnographic, case study was conducted with 19 Dena’ina youths in Nondalton, Alaska to examine the role of subsistence culture in their subjective wellbeing and future aspirations. Mixed-methods were used, including surveys, interviews and participant-observation over the course of one year. The Developmental Assets Framework and local knowledge were used to interview youths about life experiences in six life domains, including: family, friends, school, self, community and culture. Surveys queried youths’ subjective wellbeing and aspirations, daily routines, and participation in various cultural activities. Participant-observation was conducted in fish camps, family homes, school, community events, and on the land.

Study findings suggest that these youths generally experience high levels of life satisfaction, identify strongly with subsistence culture, and desire to practice these traditions in the future. However, individual wellbeing is more variable and patterns of dissatisfaction related to discontinuities in the educational system, peer and elder relationships, and community cohesion are evident. Youths are increasingly faced with historically unprecedented choices and opportunities that conflict with subsistence activities. These factors converge to distance youths from their cultural heritage and diminish their wellbeing and expectations for the future, despite their desires to engage more with these practices. This study suggests that cultural activity is a protective factor for positive youth development and wellbeing. Such activity, in principal and in practice, fosters coherence, continuity and connectivity to increase youths’ resilience and capacity to navigate the challenges of coming of age at a crossroads of social and personal change.
CHAPTER 1: NAVIGATING TO NONDALTON

...the unique historical legacy of dislocation for American Indian-Alaska Native peoples, coupled with the intensity of contemporary threats to the physical, social and economic vitality of their communities, accentuate the importance of health promotion efforts that are culturally appropriate and nested in a community context (Blum, et al. 1992).

1.1 Origins of the Study
In late summer of 2003, I stepped off a boat onto the beach of Nondalton, Alaska, a Dena’ina Athabascan village (pop. 164) in Southwest Alaska accessible only by air, water (summer), or snowmobile (winter). I arrived with several other National Park Service (NPS) employees, who had made the approximately one-hour trip “downlake” from the Lake Clark National Park headquarters in Port Alsworth to celebrate the graduation of several Nondalton youths from an NPS program that had trained them for several summer weeks in the basics of fisheries science. The air was palpable with celebratory spirit, and it was clear from conversations with local residents that they were delighted young Dena’ina people were learning to protect and preserve a highly valued local resource. Fish have long been important to the people of Nuvendaltin, as the village is known in the Dena’ina language (Ellanna and Ballutta 1992). The annual harvest of sockeye salmon returning from the Bristol Bay watershed comprises a substantial portion of local food supply, and the fish and other subsistence resources are harvested “...in part because they are a preferred traditional food” (Fall, et al. 2008:166) and in part because it is a preferred traditional economic and cultural activity (Gaul 2007; Stickman, et al. 2005). Indeed, the annual sockeye run, one of the largest in the world, is the reason the national park was established on December 2, 1980 when President Carter signed into law the Alaska National Lands Interest Conservation Act (Gaul 2007).

I was intrigued by what residents shared with me on that and subsequent trips to the community, as an NPS interpretive park ranger and as the occasional “off duty” guest of a local Dena’ina friend or acquaintance who invited me to the Nondalton Culture Camp or a family home. While I was tasked in my official capacity with educating residents and other members of the public about local resources, more often my new friends and neighbors educated me, about the history and culture of the Dena’ina people and the importance of the land to their economic and cultural survival for generations upon generations. In particular, I was struck by the comments of elders who charged that Dena’ina youths were not taking up traditional cultural activities of subsistence fishing and hunting and their concerns that the perceived lack of youth engagement with these activities boded a decline in the wellbeing of both youths and the Dena’ina community at large. As a medical anthropologist-in-training with a focus on children, my ears perked at the elders’ comments about youths, culture, and wellbeing, and I was left wondering what the youths themselves would say about the fears expressed for them and their future and the perception that their culture no longer mattered to this youngest generation of Dena’ina people. I had moved from Ohio
to Alaska in spring of 2003 looking for a site to do research and a locally-relevant topic related to Alaska Native youth health or wellbeing, and it appeared that perhaps I had found both in Nondalton. While I was still and would remain for some time yet a ‘cheechako’—a tenderfoot or newcomer to Alaska—my ethnographic gut told me there was something important to be explored in more depth about this discourse and the evolving relationship between youths, subsistence and wellbeing. I “tested” the idea of doing research on the topic in conversations with community members and, upon receiving favorable feedback, went forward with developing a plan.

1.2 Research Questions and Aims

In the fall and winter of 2006, three years after my first visit to the community, I wrote a proposal to conduct an ethnographic study in Nondalton over the course of one year, a complete ‘seasonal round’. This study was designed to answer three research questions:

1. How do contemporary Dena’ina youths engage with subsistence and other traditional cultural activities?

2. How do Dena’ina youths perceive their wellbeing in and across multiple life domains?

3. What role does subsistence and other traditional cultural activities play in Dena’ina youths’ wellbeing and aspirations for the future?

To answer these questions, I sought to accomplish four specific aims:

1. Conduct a case study of Dena’ina youths’ participation in subsistence and other cultural activities at fish camps, in homes, at school, on the land, and at community gatherings across a seasonal round.

2. Examine the subjective wellbeing of Dena’ina youth across multiple life domains, with emphasis on their experience and identification with subsistence and other cultural activities.

3. Examine the aspirations of Dena’ina youth, including desired and expected adult participation in a range of activities, including cultural, community, family, educational and vocational activities.

1 It is important to note that there are four linguistic and social groups of Dena’ina Athabascan peoples in Alaska, including the Inland Dena’ina, Upper Cook Inlet Dena’ina, Lower Cook Inlet Dena’ina, and Iliamna Dena’ina. While there are linguistic, familial and other social ties between the four groups, references to ‘Dena’ina youths’ herein refer only to the Inland Dena’ina youths who participated in this study and are not meant to be generalized to all Dena’ina youths.
4. Understand how subsistence and other traditional cultural activities figure into the contemporary wellbeing and future aspirations of a cohort of rural Alaska Native youth.

These aims would be accomplished with a mixed-methods study that included participant-observation, surveys and interviews. Interviews would be conducted primarily with the youths themselves, and additional input would be sought from parents and elders. Youths would be asked about how they perceived their lives in the present and their aspirations for the future, including and especially their views on subsistence and other traditional cultural activities. To position youths’ views on these activities in the broader context of their ‘everyday’ lives, they would be surveyed and interviewed about their perceived wellbeing—overall and in the life domains typical for youths’ in Nondalton and around the globe (school, family, friends, community, self). Finally, in an effort to triangulate and compare these self-reports with observational data, I would participate as much as possible with youth and their families in subsistence activities as well as other community activities and events throughout the year. As noted previously by anthropologists doing participant observation in northern Athabaskan societies, such research “. . . requires that the ethnographer attempts to replicate the behavior involved in the activities he [or she] is documenting and to learn to perform each technique at least at a minimal level of proficiency” (Nelson 1973:8 quoted in Ellanna and Ballutta 1992:6). For that reason, I would spend as much time as possible at fish camps, in family homes and on the land with families, learning to harvest and preserve natural resources—primarily fish—and participating in and observing other cultural activities with youths and their families. My doctoral committee approved the proposal in December 2006, and the following month I presented the research plan to the Nondalton Tribal Council. The Council granted permission to conduct the study in their community, with the promise that I would return the results of the research to the community when completed and an awareness that “sharing knowledge is . . . a long-term commitment” (Smith 1999). I prepared an IRB\(^2\) application and began making arrangements to travel to the community.

Between May 2008 and June 2009, I made six field visits to Nondalton, ranging from two and six weeks each and totaling just over six months spent living in the village and surrounding area (e.g., fish camp). During that time, I conducted semi-structured interviews and surveys with a total of 19 youths between the ages of 10 and 19 years, as well as unstructured interviews with parents, elders, teachers, and health care providers, and non-Native residents, neighbors, and visitors to the community. I participated in and observed summer fish camp, winter trapping and ice fishing, and spring and summer gathering of berries and greens, among other cultural activities and events, such as Russian New Year, Culture Week, Winter Carnival, and the Native Youth Olympics. The results of this research and the associated implications for understanding

\(^2\) This study was approved and annually renewed by the Case Western Reserve University Institutional Review Board, in addition to being approved by the Nondalton Tribal Council.
the relationship between youth wellbeing and cultural activities is the focus of this dissertation.

1.3 Chapter Overview

The chapters that follow present a case study of one cohort of contemporary Dena’ina Athabascan youth. This research was centered on the youths’ subjective wellbeing, experiences, and identifications with subsistence hunting and fishing and other cultural activities of “traditional” Dena’ina life. While documenting the experiences of just one group of Athabascan youths in the Alaska subarctic, however, this study contributes to our understanding more broadly of the dilemmas faced and strategies employed by contemporary indigenous youths “coming of age” in societies undergoing rapid social change in an era of increasing globalization, pluralism and contact. I suggest it contributes to our understanding of the relationships of youth wellbeing and cultural activities in general.

The case study method, while limiting the scope and comparability of the findings with other communities, was selected with a keen awareness of the long and detrimental history of ‘helicopter’ research in anthropology and other academic disciplines; this history of researchers who “literally or figuratively fly into their communities, administer surveys, and leave—never to be heard from again by the community” has led indigenous communities across the Americas to rightly distrust and increasingly reject research, especially by “outside” researchers (Ferreira and Gendron 2011:154). For this dissertation research to occur, therefore, it was important from an ethical and methodological stance, both professionally and personally, that I remain in and return to the community sufficiently over time to build sustainable and trustworthy relationships with youths, their families, tribal council members, and other community members. While actual data collection for this study occurred in the course of one year, the process of building and sustaining relationships in the community, necessary for both preparing to collect and interpreting the data, has spanned nearly a decade, and I hope it will continue long into the future.

In Chapter 2, the research setting is described and an introduction is provided to the extensive and growing canon of social scientific research on subsistence in Alaska. While most of this research, to date, has focused on Alaska Native communities and cultures other than the Dena’ina—such as the work of Fienup-Riordan (2000) and Hensel (1996) with Yup’ik peoples—and regional subsistence activities vary across the state, it is also true that political, social, and economic patterns of subsistence are generally comparable across different regions due to common factors of geographic remoteness and a shared history of introduced political, social, and economic structures and systems (i.e. Russian and American occupation). For example, subsistence in the northern Inupiaq community of Diomede near the Russian border rely heavily on blue crab, while in the Tlingit community of Kake in Southeast Alaska, families eat gumboots and seal. However, in both communities, as in Nondalton and Native communities across Alaska, elders voice concerns about youths’ lack of adoption of the subsistence activities that have ensured their individual and collective survival and wellbeing for centuries. And in most, if not all, of these communities, youths are challenged to find meaningful ways to engage themselves in a world that is increasingly mobile,
monetized, and multicultural, which culminate in a different set of opportunities, expectations and dilemmas for contemporary youths, with regard to subsistence and other cultural activities, than existed for their parents and grandparents at their age. Thus, while the details of subsistence practice do vary, the dynamics of subsistence practices and politics and their role in the lives of rural Alaska Native youths are remarkably similar across the state. It is on the basis of these similarities that I argue the findings of this community study can be applied, if done cautiously, to youths in other rural Alaska Native communities. With those similarities, though, also come important regional and local differences, and these must not be overlooked or subsumed by the desire to compare. Thus, Chapter 2 also provides a brief description of the seasonal round of specific subsistence activities which have guided social and economic activity in Nondalton and Inland Dena’ina country for generations and significantly still do today, and which play an important role in the sukdu’a, or stories, of the Dena’ina that are handed down from one generation to another. Chapter 3 departs this discussion on subsistence briefly to provide an overview of the history of anthropological research on children and childhood and then narrows to focus on the emergence in recent decades of a growing interest among anthropologists and others involved in childhood studies on two lines of scholarship that intersect in this dissertation, that of children as social actors and the assessment of children’s subjective wellbeing in diverse social and cultural contexts. It is here that we see how the study of subsistence cultures is relevant to expanding our knowledge and understanding of human development and how youths in contexts of rapid social change are navigating (or creating) the multiple and amorphous paths before them. Chapter 4 presents a detailed description of the methodology of the study, including a portrait of the youths who participated. Chapter 5 begins the presentation of findings and the exploration of how youths view their present lives and their aspirations for the future, organized around the five domains of youth life typical for most groups of children around the world—family, friends, school, self, and community—about which Dena’ina youths were surveyed and interviewed. Chapter 6 continues the presentation of the study findings with an in-depth focus on youths’ perspective on the role of traditional cultural values and activities in their lives today and in the future, and subsistence activities in particular. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation with discussion of how these data and the critical sociohistorical moment in which they emerged inform knowledge on the developmental relationship between youths’ wellbeing and the cultural activities and rapidly changing social environments in which they are coming of age in the 21st century.
CHAPTER 2: THE RESEARCH SETTING, SUBSISTENCE AND SURVIVAL

... the Dena’ina Athabascans of the Lake Clark area provide an opportunity to view, through multiple perspectives, a different way of life, which has changed in many ways but not become homogenized, westernized, or extinct in the sense predicted by explorers, adventurers, and early social scientists (Ellanna and Ballutta 1992: 10).

...one reason why modern states and bureaucracies have been slow to recognize the benefits of subsistence cultures is that they are not well equipped to deal with the integral and communal characteristics of subsistence economies, which are not only material but also profoundly social and spiritual in nature (Thornton 2001).

Children are incredibly resilient. They figured out ways to survive.
– Dan Wildcat, Director, American Indian Studies Program, Haskell Indian Nations University (quoted in Jessepe 2008)

2.1 Introduction
For many generations, through policies of cultural assimilation and government-run boarding-schools, indigenous peoples across North America were systematically prohibited by teachers, clergy, medical personnel, and other authorities to speak their languages and practice traditional cultural activities (Jessepe 2008; Moore 2008). Since the 1960s, however, with Vine Deloria’s famous manifesto (1969) and the rise of the American Indian Movement (Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997b), an “indigenous cultural renaissance” (Sanchez-Way and Johnson 2000) has emerged across North, Central, and South America that has elevated indigenous and academic consciousness and turned critical attention to cultural activities and social structures once believed to be all but gone (see, for example, Aradanans 1998; Meyer and Alvarado 2010; Wiwchar 2005). Cultural activities such as living on the land—also called subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering—as well as traditional Native forms of dance, art, healing, languages, and even architectural design, once touted as artifacts of societies about to go extinct, have instead become symbols of cultural resilience and revitalization in the face of centuries of colonial-industrial threat to individual and cultural survival and wellbeing.

In the scholarly literature, as in my conversations with Dena’ina elders in Nondalton, culture has been invoked as providing youths protection and enhancing resilience in the face of otherwise overwhelming personal, social, and political-economic stressors. Sanchez-Way and Johnson (2000) assert that the protective effects of culture on health and wellbeing manifest indirectly through family, community, peer networks, language, ritual, and spirituality. Health and wellbeing in this context refer to psychosocial health and development and subjective wellbeing, or life satisfaction.
within and across locally valued domains or dimensions of human existence (e.g., self, social relationships, work, and school). Supportive relationships and spiritual principles are integral to community-based, cultural approaches to health promotion because they provide “sites or sources of social identity and attachment” (Eckersley and Dear 2002) and the sense of “having a life purpose [that] has been found to be predictive of positive life adaptation (Sanchez-Way and Johnson 2000:25). In other words, they provide the necessary opportunities and means to develop a cultural identification that give youth “a stake in society” (Sanchez-Way and Johnson 2000:22). However, we still know little about how various groups of youths actually take up traditional cultural activities and identify with them as factors of personal and collective wellbeing. This chapter provides a description of the setting for this research and reviews literature on previous research dealing with the role of traditional cultural activities—particularly those related to subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering—in contemporary Alaska Native (AN) cultures.

2.2 The Setting

**Alaska**

Alaska is geographically the largest of the 50 United States, spanning 570,640 square miles, equal to one-fifth of the land mass of the continental states known to Alaskans as the “lower 48”. This geographic expanse partly explains the state being the least densely populated, with just over 710,000 people, half of whom reside in Anchorage, and only 1.2 residents per square mile (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Another important factor in the low population density is that most of Alaska can be accessed only by small aircraft or boat. Figure 2.1 below depicts the six major regions of the state, including: Southeast, Interior, Northern, Southcentral/Anchorage, Gulf Coast, and, the setting for this research, Southwest.

**Southwest Alaska**

The Southwest region of Alaska covers more than 90,000 square miles of land and water surface, approximately equivalent to the size of the state of Oregon. Southwest Alaska is geologically active with frequent earthquakes and 36 of the 41 active volcanoes in the state (Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference 2010). The region is dissected by two physiographic systems, the Pacific Mountains and the Intermontane Basins and Plateaus, with seven distinct ecosystems that include a multitude of natural habitats ranging from coastal cliffs and tide-flats to inland lakes and boreal forests (Pearson and Hermans 2001).

Southwest Alaska includes four boroughs and two federally-recognized census areas that include 29 incorporated municipalities and 29 additional communities that are recognized as Alaska Native Village Statistical Areas (ANVSA) or Census Designated Places (CDP) by the federal government or unincorporated areas by the State of Alaska.

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3 There are numerous taxonomies of Alaska’s geographic regions. Some maps delineate the Aleutian Islands as a separate region, while others include them in the Southwest region. The demographic descriptions of the Southwest region provided herein include the Aleutians East and Aleutians West Boroughs.
Figure 2.1: Alaska's geographic regions and boroughs
Figure 2.2: Alaska Native corporate regions established by ANCSA\(^4\,5\). In addition to local governments, the political terrain of the Southwest region contains state and federal legislative districts, nine school districts, several of the 13 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) regional corporations (Figure 2.2), 46 ANCSA village corporations, and 55 tribal governments (Bureau of Indian Affairs; Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference 2010). Of the 229 tribes in Alaska that are federally-recognized by the United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), 55 (24%) are in the Southwest region.

Land ownership in Southwest Alaska, as in the rest of the state, is complicated and frequently controversial and contested. Land is owned, in descending order of total quantity, by the federal government, the State of Alaska, and private entities. More than 285 million acres of federally-owned lands are designated as national park sites and wildlife refuges, while the remainder is managed as military reservations and multiple-use lands for timber, fish and wildlife, recreation, water, and mining (Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference 2010). More than 30 million acres of state land in the region is also managed as parks, wildlife refuges, and critical habitats for recreational purposes and resource protection, including Wood-Tikchik State Park, the nation’s largest state park at 1.6 million acres. In addition to these protected lands, the state has significant holdings in the region with potential for natural resource extraction and development.

\(^4\) 43 U.S.C. § 1606 also established a 13\(^{th}\) corporation for Alaska Native descendents not living in the state.

\(^5\) Map courtesy of First Alaskans Institute in Anchorage.
Native corporations are collectively the largest holders of private land in the region, with less than one million acres of surface and subsurface lands and just over 5 million acres of subsurface estate owned by more than 15,000 shareholders living within and outside the region and state. Other private lands are held as trust lands; the University of Alaska and the Alaska Mental Health Trust have holdings that they periodically sell to generate revenue for beneficiaries, and the federal government holds lands in trust that are designated for eventual conveyance to the tribes as Native Allotments per the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). Across Alaska, including in the Southwest region, less than one percent of all land is held by private landholders (Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference 2010), with approximately 10% held by Native organizations, making Alaska the state with the highest percentage of public lands.

In 2000, just over 30,000 people total resided in Southwest Alaska across four boroughs and two federally-recognized census areas, according to the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference (2010), and the population is decreasing in most of the region. In some areas of the region, the population is quite mobile and variable. In the Lake and Peninsula Borough, for example, where this research was conducted, there was a 9% population increase from 1990 to 2000, followed by a 17.5% decrease in the next eight years. This decline is projected to continue into the foreseeable future, whereas all other census areas in the region are expected to grow in population (Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development 2011).

In the Lake and Peninsula Borough, the population was 47.3% female in 2010, just slightly under the overall state percentage (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The demographic comparison becomes more complicated with age and ethnicity, however. The median age in Alaska overall increased from 29.4 years in 1990 to 33.4 years in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2000; U.S. Census Bureau 2010). While this increase was reflected in Southwest Alaska with a median age of just over 34 years in 2000, the age composition is uneven throughout the region (Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference 2010). The Lake and Peninsula Borough remained one of the younger areas in the region with a median age in 2000 of just over 26 years, compared to 41 years in the Bristol Bay Borough directly to the south. In 2010, more than 30% of the region was under the age of 18, compared to just over 26% of the state in general (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Thus, the area remains slightly younger on average than the state overall, as well. The Southwest region differs in some aspects from the state in ethnic makeup, as well. Southwest Alaska has proportionately more Alaska Native people and fewer White and Asian people than the state overall. In the Lake and Peninsula Borough, as Table 2.1 shows, the relative difference in proportion between Alaska Native and White people becomes even more apparent.

The economy of Southwest Alaska is as diverse as the people who live there. The region is typically described as having a “mixed, subsistence-based economy,” meaning that residents rely on a combination of subsistence resources, such as hunting and fishing, as well as wage labor and other forms of cash income, such as Native
Table 2.1: Ethnic composition of the state, region and borough in 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alaska</th>
<th>Southwest Alaska</th>
<th>Lake and Peninsula Borough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N (%),</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>481,242</td>
<td>13,045 (47)</td>
<td>341 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska Native or American Indian</td>
<td>103,317</td>
<td>8,519 (31)</td>
<td>1,062 (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>31,267</td>
<td>4,452 (16)</td>
<td>12 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>27,869</td>
<td>454 (2)</td>
<td>2 (&lt;1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>4,078</td>
<td>172 (1)</td>
<td>8 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more groups</td>
<td>31,947</td>
<td>1,221 (4)</td>
<td>127 (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


corporation dividends or government transfers. Key sources of wage labor in the region are the seafood industry and government, with additional jobs in tourism, mining, construction, and service sectors. Southwest Alaska has some of the most productive salmon fisheries in the world, and salmon has been a mainstay of the regional economy for centuries. The high rate of unemployment in the region (12%) compared to the state overall (7%) is due to a combination of the lack of wage-labor, the seasonal nature of many cash-paying jobs, and the continued cultural and economic importance of subsistence in most households and communities (Northern Economics 2004). In 2000, residents of the region harvested, on average, nearly 250 pounds of subsistence resources per capita, more than 2.5 times the state average overall. This figure is even higher in the Lake and Peninsula Borough, where this research occurred, with an average annual per capita harvest of 345 pounds of subsistence resources in 2008, down from 602 pounds in 2000 (Northern Economics 2004; Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference 2010). Thus, the region relies heavily on subsistence resources, though significantly less so than in times past, a shift that is directly associated with the increased availability of store-bought food flown in from Anchorage and the accompanying decline of sled dogs as a means of transportation as plane transport has become increasingly common.

Southwest Alaska is culturally as diverse as it is in other ways. Figure 2.3 shows that the region is home to four major Alaska Native indigenous groups, including: (1) the Dena’ina Athabascan people, one of the eleven major groups of Northern Athabascan peoples in Alaska; (2) the Aleut, or Unangan, peoples of the Aleutian and Pribolof Islands; (3) the Central Yup’ik and Cup’ik peoples, sometimes referred to as the Bering Sea Eskimo peoples (Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988); and (4) the Sugpiaq, or Alutiiq, peoples. Each of these groups is comprised of numerous sub-groups with diverse and complex linguistic, cultural, and political histories, land use patterns and geographic boundaries. These boundaries have been shifting since people first crossed the Bering
Land Bridge to occupy the region somewhere between 20,000 and 15,000 B.C. While the Aleutian Islands have been a major area of archaeological investigation in the region, the cultural margins and history of mainland Southwest Alaska are not well known (Selkregg and Hopkins 2006). Today, however, the area is occupied, as it has been for centuries, by the Yup’ik Eskimo and Dena’ina Athabascan peoples. This research reported in this dissertation took place in the Dena’ina Athabascan village of Nondalton, Alaska.

**Nondalton**

Nondalton (Nuvendaltin), Alaska is located 190 miles southwest of Anchorage in the Lake and Peninsula Borough. The village lies in a transitional climatic zone between the Aleutian Range to the south and the Alaska Range to the north, flanked by lakes, glaciers, boreal forest, taiga, and alpine tundra that separate it from Cook Inlet to the east, the Bering Sea to the west and, to the south, Bristol Bay, home of the world’s most productive sockeye salmon fishery. The village sits on the west shore of Six Mile Lake (Nundaltin Vena) at the head of the Newhalen River (Nughilvetnu), connecting two of the largest freshwater lakes in Alaska—Lake Clark to the north (sixth largest in Alaska) and Lake Iliamna to the south (largest in Alaska). Together, these comprise the northern reaches and headwaters of the Kvichak watershed, which produces 33% of the sockeye salmon caught in Bristol Bay and 50% of the entire U.S. sockeye catch (Nondalton Tribal Council 2006).

The current village population of 164 year-round residents is down 26% from 221 people in 2000 (Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development 2012; U.S. Census Bureau 2000; U.S. Census Bureau 2010). According to community members, Nondalton families and individual residents have migrated from the village to urban centers, primarily, for various reasons in the last decade, including cost of living, employment, education, and health and other services (fieldnotes). In 2010, the Census Bureau reported that children (0 to 17 years of age) comprise 31% of residents and live in nearly 40% of households in the community. The median age of residents is 28.8 years (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Nearly 85% of Nondalton residents today are Alaska Native (U.S. Census Bureau 2010), most of whom are Northern Athabascan and belong to the Dena’ina tribes of the Cook Inlet area, with social and ancestral ties to the region reaching hundreds of years or more into the past, although the exact time of Dena’ina occupation of the area is unknown (Ellanna and Ballutta 1992). There are four distinct linguistic dialects of Dena’ina, including the Inland Dena’ina dialect spoken in Nondalton and extending west to the Mulchatna River and Central Yup’ik areas, south to the Iliamna region and north to Lime Village and the Stony River (Gaul 2007). The other three dialects of Dena’ina are (1) Upper Inlet Dena’ina, spoken from the northern reaches of Cook Inlet to the Alaska Range in the north and the Chugach Range in the east in the villages of Tyonek, Knik, Eklutna, Montana Creek, and Chickaloon, (2) Outer Inlet Dena’ina, extending across Cook Inlet and spoken on the Kenai Peninsula, and (3) Iliamna Dena’ina, spoken in the villages of Pedro Bay and Newhalen on the edge of Lake Iliamna, the second largest freshwater lake in the U.S. and one of two in the world containing freshwater seals, still subsistence hunted by local residents.
Figure 2.3: Indigenous peoples and languages of Alaska

Kraus et al (2005) granted permission to use this map for non-commercial, educational purposes under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.
Nondalton has a “mixed-subsistence economy”, meaning that residents rely substantially still today on subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering as well as some wage-based employment and other forms of cash income to pay for heating oil, fuel, rifles, ammunition, fishing supplies, vehicles, store-bought food, clothing, plane rides to Anchorage, and a multitude of other goods (Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development 2012). Paying jobs are in short supply, however, and can be difficult to secure year-round or even seasonally. According to Fall and colleagues (2006), those with seasonal jobs in 2004 worked between 7 and 8 months on average, annually. While subsistence activities do not involve the exchange of cash, they depend substantially on cash input for associated costs of fuel, vehicles (e.g., boats, ATVs, snowmachines), and other supplies (e.g., rifles, fishing nets) (Langdon 1991). Most adult community members with paying jobs work seasonally in, for example, commercial fishing, wild land firefighting, or the National Park Service. Other paid jobs include working for the Nondalton Tribal Council, health clinic, post office, city, or school. Also, in the last few years, and amid significant controversy, a variable number of residents have found primarily seasonal employment working for the Pebble project, a venture in place since 2001 to develop one of the world’s largest gold and copper mines on staked, state-owned land 18 miles southwest of the village (Fall, et al. 2006; Parker, et al. 2008). Other forms of income for some residents include government transfers and modest dividends from the Bristol Bay Native Corporation.

2.3 Inland Dena’ina Subsistence

In her ethnographic overview of Lake Clark National Park and its “Resident Zone Communities,” of which Nondalton is one, Gaul (2007) provides a concise overview of research on Dena’ina subsistence, including the early work of anthropologist Cornelius Osgood (Osgood 1933; Osgood 1937) and more recent oral histories documented in both English and Dena’ina in the last several decades (Kalifornsky 1991; Kari and Fall 2003). Other sources include reports from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence (see, for example, Behnke 1982; Fall, et al. 2006; Fall 2010; Fall 1990; Wolfe 2000; Wolfe 2004; Wolfe and Walker 1987) and studies conducted or commissioned by the National Park Service (see, for example, Ellanna and Ballutta 1992; Stickman, et al. 2005).

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence research shows that in 2004 all Nondalton households used subsistence resources, and 97% of these participated in the harvest (Fall, et al. 2006). Subsistence harvest here refers to animal or plant species that are hunted, fished, or gathered for food, heat, clothing, craft, or trade for cash, allowable up to $500 annually under current Alaska state law. Harvest surveys that year showed that a total of 357 pounds per capita of subsistence resources were harvested, of which 70% was fish, including salmon, trout, whitefish, grayling, char, and pike. Other harvested species included: moose, caribou, black bear, sheep, beaver, porcupine, fox, hare, and lynx, as well as migratory birds (e.g., geese, swans), and non-migratory birds (e.g., ptarmigan, grouse) (Nondalton Tribal Council 2006). Non-animal species harvested by local residents include many varieties of plants (berries, greens) for nutritional and medicinal purposes and wood for heat (fieldnotes). Thus, while subsistence practices may have shifted substantially from generations of the past—particularly in terms of
regulatory structures and technologies involved in the harvest—they remain a salient and important part of Dena’ina life today (Gaul 2007).

In the past, the inland Dena’ina people lived a highly mobile lifestyle, living on the land and following the annual cycle of natural resources from one seasonal camp to another. Elders related to me stories of how, as children, they lived with their families in spring bear camp until it was time to come down to the lake for summer fish camp, then return to the mountains for fall squirrel and moose camp. By the early 1970s, most Dena’ina were settled in village homes equipped with electricity, and no one lived on the land as they did as children, marking a major shift in the daily organization of Dena’ina life. Even after most families had settled in the village, however, elders told me that it was common for families to pack up all their belongings and move to fish camp for the summer, not to return until the start of school in the fall (fieldnotes).

While the details of these sojourns to summer fish camp have changed—for example, today some people travel back and forth from fish camp daily to the village by outboard motor boat to do laundry, check the mail, or work—the pattern of seasonal subsistence harvest in Nondalton occurs today essentially as it did in the past, beginning with the return of sockeye salmon from Bristol Bay in late June and early July (Ellanna and Ballutta 1992; Fall, et al. 2006). In late July people begin the annual gathering of berries—blueberries, salmonberries, blackberries (also called crowberries), and cranberries—continuing into fall. Fireweed blossoms, Labrador tea, and other plants are also collected during the summer months, such as mushrooms, and mature greens (Gaul 2007). Large game hunting begins in the late summer (sheep) and continues through fall (moose) and early winter (caribou), as well as migratory bird hunting. Spawning salmon (noodlevai) are caught in the fall. Trapping activities take place over the winter months, as well as ice fishing. Spring brings the return of wild celery on the mountains, as well as spring bears emerging from their dens. Small game hunting for locally-valued species, such as beaver and porcupine, as well as non-migratory birds, such as grouse, occur throughout the year, as well as wood cutting, increasing in the fall and winter as temperatures drop. Most families today continue to heat, at least supplementally, with wood and have wood-heated steam bath houses.

Nondalton was chosen as the site for this research because it has: a) a historical and contemporary dependence on subsistence resources; b) a mixed cash-subsistence economy; c) youth that comprise a large percentage of the population; d) a recent history of rapid social change; and e) contextual comparability to other subsistence-based communities in the North.

2.4 Anthropology of Subsistence in the North

Subsistence as Survival

Anthropologists have long studied the subsistence practices and cultures of Northern peoples. Indeed, Hensel (1992:3) notes that, with few exceptions, it is remarkable “how exclusively Arctic anthroplogy has focused on subsistence.”

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6 The term arctic here is used inclusively and refers, though not exclusively, to all of Alaska, which includes areas designated in most geographic, environmental, and cultural-linguistic taxonomies as belonging to the sub-arctic.
Economic and material aspects of subsistence have commanded a preponderance of anthropological attention in the North. In the classic ethnography *The Central Eskimo* by Boas (1964), for example, describes in tremendous detail the tools and techniques used for harvesting fish and game essential to survival in the Canadian Arctic. First published in 1888, this treatise belongs to the canons of “salvage anthropology,” the painstaking attempt of early American anthropologists to document the lifeways of peoples who were expected to drown in the tsunami of rapid socioeconomic change rolling toward them. Despite colonial policies of assimilation, insurgent industry, restricted land use, and government controls, however, northern societies survived.

By the mid-20th century, anthropologists sought to explain the unexpected survival of northern cultures through theoretical and empirical study of culture change. Acculturation and assimilation theories predicted that Alaska Native cultures would be unilaterally and irreversibly transformed by the forces of “modernization.” In a classic study of culture change among the Inupiat of northern Alaska, for example, Chance (1960) predicted that subsistence practices would decline and eventually “go extinct” as they were increasingly supplanted by Euro-American technological and socioeconomic organization and political governance. Chance’s Westernization theory positioned the Inupiat peoples of northern Alaska on a linear continuum from “traditional” to “modern,” on which all societies could presumably be rated and ranked according to quantifiable and standardized factors (e.g., personality traits or technology use). Observing that few Inupiat youth possessed the skills or interest for living on the land with the self-sufficiency of their elders and ancestors, Chance (1987:85) predicted a “transformational shift from one mode of life to another” and suggested subsistence practice would give way to wage labor and new class stratifications as a market-driven capitalist economy replaced the kin-based, domestic economy. Though problematic in its conceptualization of change as occurring along a single, unilinear trajectory, this theory improved upon the Boasian approach by conceptualizing culture change as a dynamic and adaptive process in which indigenous cultures could and would survive, even if some “traditional” practices did not.

Reality eventually complicated these acculturation theories, however, and required the social theorists to reconsider these dire predictions for the subsistence practices of northern cultures. Alaska Native peoples continued to live off the land, in some ways more efficiently so, as they adopted Western technologies (e.g., snowmobiles, outboard motors) and economic structures (e.g., corporations), and as they adapted Native lifeways to new political and economic opportunities and obstacles. Alaska Native cultures certainly did not disappear, nor did the values and practices, such as subsistence hunting and fishing, that sustained them for millennia. Reviewing and critiquing his own work 20 years hence, Chance reflected that his earlier understanding of culture change “telescopes a long historical past into the phrase ‘traditional’ and poses the future as a never-ending present” (1987:86), thereby reifying a false dichotomy, and one falsely presumed as mutually exclusive, between “Western” capitalist and “Native” subsistence economies. Rather than fading in the face of modernizing forces, Native subsistence economies transmuted into a resilient synthesis of kin- and cash-based economies, or what Wolfe (2004) and others describe as a mixed-
market economy and is referred to in this thesis as a mixed cash-subsistence economy. Chance (1987:87) notes that the series of increasingly sharp economic, social, and political conflicts resulting from the interpenetration of these two modes of production . . . [requires that] researchers investigating the continuing viability of subsistence as a way of life must . . . study this articulation in depth—not to justify one position or another, but to gain a deeper understanding of the forces that are reshaping rural Alaska and the changing subsistence patterns of its largely Native residents.” Thus, the rapid social and economic changes enveloping Alaska Native cultures in the latter 20th century neither caused the demise of these cultures nor their practice of subsistence, but succeeded instead in changing the context in which it occurs and becomes articulated with cultural, social, economic, and political significance. Research documenting the economic significance of subsistence practice for largely Native rural Alaska communities includes that, for example, by Fall (1990), Jorgenson (1990) and Wolfe and Walker (1987). The state and federal governments primarily manage these efforts with use of in-depth “harvest assessments” conducted by anthropologists working for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game that quantify the type and amount of subsistence foods harvested by studied communities.

Subsistence as Power and Political Discourse

With passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971 and the Alaska National Lands Interest Conservation Act in 1980, anthropologists have increasingly been called to assist federal and state policy makers and program managers in understanding this context and its implications for the provision of health and social services, natural resource conservation, and economic development. Most recently, anthropologists have employed interpretive approaches to examine social and cultural dimensions of subsistence in northern societies (e.g., 2000; 1992). This literature supports the long-held assertions of Alaska’s Native peoples that living on the land or

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7 The Alaska Native Settlement Claims Act (ANSCA) went into effect on December 17, 1971. With the passage of this legislation, Alaska Native peoples relinquished all land claims in the state in exchange for $962.5 million and 178,000 sq. km. of land, about one-ninth the total land mass of Alaska. The legislation created 12 Native regional corporations, which gained surface mineral rights to settlement lands, and divided the surface land rights among these corporations, including a thirteenth corporation representing Alaska Native people living outside the state. The regional corporations are responsible for administering settlement monies, investing funds and redistributing profits as determined by shareholders. Additionally, ANCSA created more than 200 village corporations.

8 The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), signed by President Jimmy Carter on December 2, 1980, created 106 million acres of new conservation lands in Alaska, doubling the size of both the US National Park System and the National Wildlife Refuge System and tripling the size of the National Wilderness Preservation System (Henning, et al. 1981; Willis 2005). This legislation marked “the largest allocation of public lands since the establishment of the National Forest System . . . and, as a comprehensive approach to land management, it remains unprecedented. It also gave preference to residents of Alaska’s rural communities for use of these lands for subsistence harvest. Together, these acts and the steps leading to them heightened popular and scholarly attention to the social and cultural dimensions of subsistence, including extensive research on subsistence undertaken by the National Park Service beginning in 1974 (see, e.g., Willis 2005).
simply living their cultural lifeways, what outsiders have termed “subsistence,” comprises not only a mechanism for physical survival, but essential means for achieving and maintaining personal wellbeing, social identity, and cultural survival (Alaska Federation of Natives 1989). Hensel (1992) substantiates this viewpoint with an ethnographic analysis of subsistence in western Alaska in which he interprets subsistence as a key discursive practice used by both Natives and non-Natives to articulate shifting boundaries of identity and ethnicity. Subsistence, according to Hensel, serves as a critical tool for “interactively negotiating potential congruency in world view” in the post-colonial setting where “the colonizers and the colonized live side by side and interact in myriad ways” (Hensel 1992:263).

Thus, while the import of Western goods and values made, for some, subsistence practices less economically essential, it simultaneously increased the political and cultural currency of subsistence as a critical element in the survival and sovereignty of Alaska’s indigenous societies. Thus, subsistence can be seen as part of the dynamic process of constructing sociopolitical and personal networks of identity and agency. Not only did the insurgence of Western political control, social reform, and modern technology fail to diminish the economic importance of subsistence for the Yup’ik peoples, therefore, it actually increased its cultural significance. As government controls and conflict over land claims intensified, threatened, and transformed Native lifeways, subsistence came to represent critical elements of identity and the intensified struggle for cultural survival and personal wellbeing.

Fienup-Riordon (2000) points out the historical irony in the late 20th century recognition by anthropologists of culture as a dynamic and heterogeneous process. She notes that this rejection of an objectivist, essentialist, ahistorical concept of culture is occurring just as Native peoples around the world endorse essentialism as a powerful antidote to the popular Western definition of their views of the world as “primitive,” “simple” and “doomed” . . . . This self-conscious “culturalism” in which one’s culture is seen as something one possesses, a thing that should be “maintained” and “preserved,” is firmly rooted in the wider society (Fienup-Riordan 2000:48). This “culturalist” perspective is evident in the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) declaration that “Alaska Natives are a people of the land and that maintaining traditional relationships to land they have historically used and occupied is essential to . . . physical, emotional and cultural wellbeing of all Alaska Natives” (Alaska Federation of Natives 1989: xx, emphasis added). Implicit in this statement is the notion that Alaska Native cultural survival and individual wellbeing depends in an essential and enduring way on subsistence practice. Indeed, contemporary references to subsistence practice among Alaska Native groups, in both popular and scholarly discourse, rarely fail to suggest a relationship between the wellbeing of Alaska Native peoples, individually and collectively, and the practice of traditional cultural activities such as living on the land. Thus, subsistence practice is neither strictly about identity nor economy, but deeply rooted in, and a defining instrument of, both, among contemporary Alaska Native peoples. A report on the historical role of subsistence among people in the Bristol Bay region of Alaska succinctly concluded, “subsistence sources are obtained not only to
fulfill economic needs, but to satisfy dietary preferences, maintain cultural traditions and provide greater security for [the] people” (ADF&G 1992 quoted in McLean 1998:10).

Though defined in state and federal law as the “customary and traditional uses” of wild resources for food, clothing, fuel transportation, construction, art, crafts, sharing and customary trade” (Wolfe 2000), subsistence incorporates myriad meanings and practices at the local level, making it difficult to define in broad terms. The word subsistence is itself an artifact of the Euro-American juridical system, with no direct equivalent in Aleut, Inupiaq, Tlingit, Yup’ik, or Gwichi’n languages. For example, an informational flyer for the public about the Federal Subsistence Management Program, which has overseen hunting, trapping, and fishing on Alaska’s federal public lands since 1990, quotes an Inupiaq Eskimo and member of a Subsistence Regional Advisory Council:

Subsistence is a way that Native Peoples of Alaska have preserved their cultures. This way of life is not confined to the land. It stretches out to the sky and...the waters and rivers. The creatures of the earth gives themselves to the People, who in turn share with family and friends, shaping relationships that celebrate life. (US Fish and Wildlife Service).

Wolfe (2004:52) correctly notes that “what is generally called ‘subsistence’ in law is in fact a broad array of distinct, localized traditions established by identifiable communities of users.” He states that these localized traditions result from a convergence of ecological, community, cultural, and economic factors. Ecological factors provide opportunities and constraints for communities, and cultural traditions determine the actual practices that occur within the range of those options.

For several decades, anthropologists and other social scientists have conducted research on the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of Alaska Native groups to identify and understand these localized traditions in diverse communities (Huntington 1998; Huntington 2000). This scholarship has resulted in detailed taxonomies of place names, plants, land use patterns, and subsistence practices such as, for example, the typical cycle, methods, and roles involved in harvest and preservation of wild food resources, such as Andersen and colleagues’ (2004) study of the knowledge and harvest of non-salmon fish among people in the Koyukon river drainage. Essentially, these contemporary examples of “salvage anthropology” aim to record and preserve local knowledge, typically considered the province of elders, regarding a culture group’s socio-historical relationship to the natural environment and understandings of the environment itself. Data from TEK research has aided federal land managers and biologists to protect wildlife populations and predict policy impacts on natural resources about which Native elders have provided information regarding, for example, over-winter migration patterns or climate change (Watson, et al. 2003). In Nondalton, for example, the National Park Service sponsored TEK research to document local ecological knowledge about freshwater fish (Stickman, et al. 2005). A defining element of TEK research, if one realized more often in theory than in practice, is the intentional
emphasis and value placed on local knowledge and interpretations (Geertz 2000) of natural phenomena as instruments for supplementing, guiding, or at least informing Western natural resource science and management (Moller, et al. 2004).

In addition to documenting their ecological knowledge and practices through participation in TEK research, Alaska Native communities have demonstrated growing interest in preserving localized knowledge about subsistence practices by reinvigorating value for these activities and cultivating skills related to their practice among younger generations. What can be described as a cultural renaissance has emerged in roughly the last two decades among some culture groups in Alaska. One example of this renaissance is found in the annual intergenerational gatherings called “culture camps” and “spirit camps” that occur in many communities. Lasting from several days to a few weeks, these gatherings often bring together elders and youth to evoke Native values, transmit knowledge and engender participation in valued cultural activities. For example, at a Nondalton culture camp that I was invited to attend in 2005, children, parents and elders participated together in Dena’ina language instruction, birch bark basket making, lessons on making traditional Dena’ina subsistence foods, as well as wood carving and skin sewing. Culture and spirit camps have become such widespread phenomenon in recent decades that, in 2003, the First Alaskans Institute, a Native leadership organization based in Anchorage, convened a gathering of spirit camp directors and staff, educators, philanthropists, program operators, and elders to share lessons learned for best practices that focus on cultural preservation, healthy communities, and academic success. The film that resulted from the gathering proclaims that while the camps are diverse in their function and mission, that

all such efforts rest on the assumption that traditional Native knowledge can be a beacon of common sense in a world of conflicting values. The success of these programs comes from Native peoples’ reliance on their own intellect, rooted in the land, to guide themselves and their children in the present and in the future. Spirit camps stress community responsibility, not just individual rights. They teach sharing and hard work, respect for nature and for all people, celebration of language and heritage, the virtues of humility and cooperation, love of children, and reverence for elders, in short, Native values (First Alaskans Institute 2003).

**Subsistence as Positive Development and Wellbeing**

Despite increased awareness and focus on the social, economic and political importance of subsistence in contemporary Alaska Native society, anthropologists have not yet examined how subsistence or other cultural activities articulate in the development and wellbeing of the youngest cohorts of Alaska Natives. Rather, research on the psychosocial health and wellbeing of Alaska Native youths most often reports an assemblage of statistics reflecting psychological distress and social pathology, reflected in alarming rates of violence and substance abuse. For instance, Alaska Native youths, particularly boys and young men, have one of the highest suicide rates in the world.
Suicide peaks among Alaska Native males and females between age 15 and 24 (Wissow 2001) with indications of increasing rates among younger cohorts (Gessner 1997). Gessner (1997) found that, between 1979 and 1993, Alaska Native youth between age 14 and 19 committed suicide at nearly four times the rate of their non-Native peers (76 versus 21 per 100,000). These figures are even more alarming in lieu of indications that suicides are “more likely to be under recorded on the death certificate than suicides among non-Natives” (Gessner 1997).

Adolescents in the United States overall have experienced a general decline in health and wellbeing in the last several decades (Compas, et al. 1995), and Alaska Native cohorts have unfortunately outpaced their peers across the nation in this downward turn. Explanations for these discouraging trends vary, but generally turn to accounts of the rapid social change engulfing Native communities and the stresses and strains these changes impose, especially on children. Indeed, in the scant literature on the health and wellbeing of youths in contemporary Alaska Native communities, one is hard-pressed to find an article that does not refer to these factors of change and their impact on rural communities. Hamilton and Seyfrit (1993), for example, provide a concise and fairly complete list of the rapid social changes to which discouraging epidemiologic and educational data are often attributed: extractive industrialization (i.e., mining and oil development); shifts from subsistence to cash economies or mixed economies; transfer payments; establishment of rural secondary education; and the arrival of satellite television in even the most remote villages. Graburn refers to the introduction of television among Canadian Inuit communities as “a late and powerful stage of ethnocide” (Graburn 1982). Since these authors conducted their studies 20 years ago, these changes have accelerated at a dizzying pace in many areas, including Nondalton. For example, the school district is challenged by federal requirements to “leave no child behind” with highly specialized curricula in a school with less than 30 students and just a small handful of fulltime teachers in K-12 classrooms, families now have not only satellite television but internet and cellular phone service, limited local employment combined with increasing centralization and sedentization necessitate some residents to rely on government transfers or migrate away to urban centers, and a transnational mining company is currently preparing to develop one of the world’s largest open-pit porphyry gold and copper mines just 18 miles from the village.

Richard Condon (1987) made similar observations in his research on changes in the developmental trajectory among Inuit youth of Holman, Canada. Prior to contact with outsiders, he notes, Inuit “children had to acquire quickly the necessary skills for survival,” precluding having significant time for recreational or peer-related activities. Concentration of the previously dispersed and nomadic population into permanent settlements, introduction of formal schooling, increased economic security, decreased reliance on subsistence activities, and the introduction of television and exposure to behavior settings and peers outside the immediate household, he argues, collectively resulted in prolonging the transition to adulthood. This, in effect, altered the developmental trajectory in such a way that new expectations emerged among youth regarding their futures, in terms of education, occupation, and place of residence.
These changes have been observed in the U.S., as well. Building on Condon’s work, Seyfrit and Hamilton (Hamilton and Seyfrit 1993; Hamilton and Seyfrit 1994; Hamilton, et al. 1997; Seyfrit and Hamilton 1992; Seyfrit and Hamilton 1997; Seyfrit, et al. 1998) have documented patterns of migration from Native village to urban centers that reflect new challenges facing adolescents coming of age in rural Alaska. Increasingly, Native youth, particularly females, migrate from rural villages to urban centers in Alaska after high school in search of educational and economic opportunities. Some of the urban migrants maintain “dual-residence,” returning intermittently to participate in seasonal subsistence harvests (Wolfe 2004). In one study of Alaska Native youth aspirations, Hamilton and Seyfrit (1994) found a broad pattern of gender differences in adolescent aspirations across two regions of Alaska with regard to out-migration from the villages and a statewide systematic relation between Native gender balance and community size, consistent with differential migration” (24). In a later study, the same authors found that 85% of 649 Alaska Native students surveyed in school districts across several regions of the state do not expect to live in their home communities throughout their lifetimes (Seyfrit and Hamilton 1997).

The dearth of empirical data on the role of subsistence in the development, wellbeing, and future orientation of Alaska Native youth deserves greater attention in light of several considerations, including: 1) the economic and sociocultural significance of subsistence in Alaska Native communities; 2) evidence that Native youth health and wellbeing has suffered greatly in the wake of the rapid changes taking place in their communities in recent decades; and 3) the recognition that young people’s “life choices and aspirations foreshadow the destiny of many Arctic villages” (Hamilton and Seyfrit 1993:255). Additionally, research that expands understanding of how these young people reconcile the challenges they face in the transition to adulthood will contribute to anthropological scholarship on diverse patterns of human development and advance understanding of how these changes impact rural Alaska Native and other indigenous societies. As Condon (1987:266-267) concluded from his research with Inuit youth in Canada:

a rapidly changing society can best be understood through an examination of young people growing up in that society . . . . there is a great need for intensive community-based studies of...adolescent development that rely upon traditional anthropological techniques of formal and informal interviewing, behavioral observation, and participant-observation . . . .[such research] should analyze the social, economic, and political pressures impinging upon today's youth as well as examine young people's own subjective reactions to and perceptions of the changing world in which they live.

Anthropologists have suggested that despite the challenges of coming of age under conditions of rapid social change, “Alaska Native [peoples] are facing the issues and seeking solutions” (Langdon 2002:122). Such assertions are reassuring in light of the fact that it is indeed the youngest generation of Alaska Natives, for whom “the self-
definitional issues of how and who to be are the most intense and problematic” (Hensel 1992:122) in the aftermath of a half-century of profound social and economic change in the rural villages. Yet, in reality, little is known about how these young people actually experience and navigate the transition to adulthood and the extent to which they embrace or reject so-called traditional cultural values and practices, such as subsistence. Indeed, we know little about how rural Alaska Native youth apprehend the complex and contradictory expectations and opportunities facing them and their expectations for the future. Nor has extant research examined what these changes tell us about patterns of human development under circumstances of rapid social change. This research helps fill this gap with an ethnographic case study that examines the experiences and aspirations of one contemporary group of Alaska Native youth.
CHAPTER 3: ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN’S WELLBEING

In what has been called the Information Age, we know surprisingly little about the state of children (Ben-Arieh, et al. 2001:1).

3.1 Introduction
While anthropologists have studied children and childhood for more than a century, recently children in anthropological research have received increasing attention as social actors in their own right (James, et al. 1998; Prout and James 1990). Previous to this, anthropologists and other social scientists frequently treated children and childhood as indicators of adult cultural patterns, processes, and idealized outcomes, while giving less consideration to children’s lived experiences in the present (Lancy 2008; LeVine 2008). Insight into children’s lives was often introduced by reference to their future social roles, rather than their experiences, expectations, and aspirations as children (Graue and Walsh 1995). In the late 20th century, however, children became a focal point for anthropologists working to understand not only how they learn culture and receive culture (culture transmission), but how they actively participate in shaping it (James 1998). At the same time, children became a magnet of interest for social scientists aiming to assess their wellbeing in and across these cultural contexts (see, for example, Ben-Arieh 2008; Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2007; Ben-Arieh, et al. 2001; Bowers Andrews and Ben-Arieh 1999; Camfield and Tafere 2009; Capizzano and Fiorillo 2004; Hill, et al. 1996; Huebner 1998b). Indeed, the last decade has seen an international revival of empirical and theoretical work on the study of child wellbeing, led predominantly by Asher Ben-Arieh and colleagues in Israel, Australia, Canada, and the U.S. (Ben-Arieh 2007; Ben-Arieh 2008; Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2007; Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2011; Ben-Arieh and Goerge 2001; Ben-Arieh, et al. 2001; Ben-Arieh, et al. 2009; Bowers Andrews and Ben-Arieh 1999). The sections that follow review the relevant historical and contemporary literature in childhood studies in anthropology and the study of child wellbeing.

3.2 Childhood Studies in Anthropology
While the anthropology of childhood commenced more than a century ago with Chamberlain’s The child: A study in the evolution of man (1907), field research on children did not begin until Mead’s 1928 treatise on adolescent girls in Samoa (LeVine 1980). The first ethnographic research on adolescence, Mead’s work produced the first scientific evidence of the cross-cultural variability of children’s social environments and behavior (Harkness 1992), thus challenging psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s (1904) universalistic claims of adolescence as an inevitable period in the life course of “storm and stress.” Hall, an American psychologist, is credited as the first person to advance the scientific study of adolescence. His work focused on evolutionary influences on adolescence, which he defined as beginning at approximately age 12 and ending as late as age 25. Borrowing from German literature, he described adolescence as a period of sturm und drang in which adolescents “oscillate” between contradictory tendencies of, for example, selfishness and altruism. Hall’s theory of adolescence fits the then-popular paradigm of unilineal sociocultural evolution espoused by prominent social theorists of
the day, such as Lewis Morgan, Edward Burnett Tylor, and Herbert Spencer. He viewed adolescence as a transitional state between the “primitive” behavior of childhood and the “civilized” behavior of adulthood, just as these social theorists considered cultures and peoples of European origin to represent “civilization” while they posited that all cultures and peoples of, for example, African, Polynesian, and Native American descent represented lesser orders of human evolution. While identified today as clearly ethnocentric and racist, understandings of human nature as well as social hierarchies and consequences, that are rooted in these unilinear and misguided models of human evolution—across sociocultural groups and the age spectrum—today remain deeply entrenched in scientific paradigms, social policies, and popular psychologies.

Since Mead’s configurationist approach to adolescence (Barnouw 1979), anthropological research on children has produced a broad array of methodological and conceptual approaches (Super 1997). Research conducted within the ‘culture and personality’ and ‘configurationist’ paradigms in anthropology was concerned with “the ways in which the culture of a society influences the persons who grow up in it” and drew together theoretical and empirical work by anthropologists, psychologists, and psychoanalytic thinkers (Barnouw 1979). This paradigm produced the first empirical cross-cultural research on children and formed the roots of contemporary psychological anthropology. According to Barnouw, anthropological research within the Culture and Personality school was mostly influenced by European schools of psychology and psychiatry (e.g., Gestalt, psychodynamic, psychoanalytic) rather than the American behaviorists who equated personality with behavior (e.g., Watson). The goal of anthropologists in this paradigm was not generally to study childhood per se, but to study the relationship of personality to culture, with the former thought to be a result and a reflection of the latter. Children became involved, in something of a default manner, through the psychoanalytic and psychodynamic emphasis on the formation of personality in childhood. Childhood is the period of the lifespan in which humans are, from this perspective, “brainwashed from birth . . . [and are] apt to lose sight of possible alternative modes of behavior and understanding” (Barnouw 1979). Anthropologists have since viewed children and childhood through the theoretical lenses of structural-functionalism (LaFontaine 1986), socialization (e.g., Whiting 1963b; Whiting 1975a; Whiting and Edwards 1988; Whiting and Child 1953), cultural ecology (e.g., LeVine 1989; Ogbu 1982; Super and Harkness 1986), political economy (e.g., Sheper-Hughes 1998, Stephens 1995), and most recently, social-constructionism (e.g., James 1998; Jenks 1993; Prout and James 1990).⁹

**Childhood as Training and Transition**

In the U.S., socialization and development became increasingly dominant paradigms for research on childhood in the social sciences in the 1950s, building on the work of Mead and others in psychology who were influenced by psychoanalytic theory.

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⁹The term *children* herein refers to people from birth to 17 years old, as defined by Ben-Arieh and colleagues (2001). It is used interchangeably with the term *youth* throughout this dissertation, as *youth* is the generally preferred term in Alaska used to refer to Alaska Native young people from birth through the early to mid-20s.
In his critique of much psychological research undertaken from this perspective, Lancy (2008:x) describes the “formula employed in child development texts” as one built on “research on middle-class Euroamerican children [who are taken] as the standard and ‘anecdotes’ from anthropological studies illustrate ‘deviation from the mean’.” Gradually recognition is growing among researchers that studies of people (including children) from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic – or ‘WEIRD’ – societies are not representative of people from most cultures, and therefore should not be generalized beyond their study contexts or taken as valid understandings of pan-human behavior and social life (Jones 2010). However, childhood development studies in psychology still often rely on mono-cultural samples to make generalizations about presumably “normal” human behavior, with the expanse of diversity in human development relegated to the lesser known (and valued) sub-field of “cultural psychology.” For Lancy and others studying children in non-WEIRD societies, childhood studies in anthropology are about both finding the “ethnographic exception” that controverts the presumed norm, but also about producing critical knowledge about the dynamics of society, its values and mechanics, and how each of these transform over time as reflected through the experiences of the youngest, most vulnerable, and most actively changing members of society.

While ostensibly focused on the child, research emerging from socialization and development paradigms has been centrally focused on the socially preferred outcomes of childhood and the relationship of childhood to broad sociocultural patterns and processes. Burton (1977:55) points out that, in socialization and development paradigms, as with the ‘culture and personality’ paradigm before them, children have “been studied with something else in mind...[such as the] adult cultural unit of which they are a part and the concept of culture itself.” Thus, they tend to reveal more about the status of children’s “well-becoming”, than they do about the wellbeing of children, as youths are typically not treated, in these paradigms, as social actors in their own right who not only absorb and learn, but also actively intercept and meaningfully shape their social worlds. In these paradigms, children are typically viewed primarily as people in training (socialization) and transition (development), beings essentially on their way to becoming something else. Putting these criticisms aside momentarily, these long-dominant paradigms of child research in the social sciences have produced volumes of information about psychosocial expectations for childhood, as well as cross-cultural variability in these expectations and their fulfillment.

In anthropology, for example, the work of Beatrice and John Whiting and colleagues (Whiting 1963a; Whiting 1975b; Whiting and Edwards 1988; Whiting and Whiting 1987; Whiting 1977; Whiting and Child 1953) led to development of more systematic, rigorous, and statistical methodological strategies to explain the link between early childhood experience and adult personality development and, more generally, the relationship of childhood and culture. The Whitings translated psychoanalytic and psychological theories into cultural-level variables that could be systematically observed and validated across cultural contexts. Research undertaken from this approach included Whiting and Child’s (1953) study of fixation and socialization practices, as well as the examination of associations between observed
culture traits, such as father absence, mother-infant co-sleeping, identification with the mother in childhood and male initiation rites in adolescence (for example, Abbot 1992; Munroe and Munroe 1984). These culture traits and their observed statistical associations were then theoretically related to aspects of adult personality formation (e.g., gender identity). This approach was criticized for producing correlational findings that were open to numerous interpretations because of their association with multiple other, unmeasured, or unidentified variables, therefore casting skepticism on the causal theoretical relationships posited by the researchers. This problem continues to plague researchers attempting to untangle the confounding roles of biological and cultural factors in shaping the social behavior of children (e.g., Ember 1973 on task assignment and gender socialization). Levine (1970:597) asserts "it is all too easy to find support of simple causal hypotheses by limiting one's investigation to a few variables rather than looking at the larger structure of relations in which they are embedded."

To accumulate a broader base of information on these potentially confounding variables, the Whitings undertook the Six Cultures Study, the first systematic, naturalistic, and comparative study of children in diverse cultural learning environments, to test hypotheses about relationships between development, personality, and culture. Research teams used “spot observations” to document the daily settings and behavior of children in cultures as diverse as India, Kenya, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, and the U.S. (Whiting 1963; Whiting and Whiting 1975). Harkness (1992) asserts that the most significant result of this pioneering work was the identification of the patterns of relationships between various aspects of children's sociocultural settings and their social behavior along two dimensions (nurturance/responsibility - dependence/dominance and sociable/intimate - authoritarian/aggressive behavior). Culture was treated in the Six Cultures Study as an independent variable, a predictor of difference of behavior between groups of children, allowing the investigators to "sort out huge amounts of behavioral data on boys and girls of varying ages in different kinds of social settings across a wide variety of cultures" (Harkness 1992:109). In this way it progressed comparative research on human development beyond the approach of Mead, allowing researchers to predict statistically the multidimensional patterns of behavior first observed by the configurationists, and led the way for B. Whiting’s subsequent work on the role of culture as a "provider of settings" with differential consequences for children's development and social behavior (Whiting and Edwards 1988). Children’s social behaviors were seen to develop in response to the social partners with whom they interact and the settings within which these interactions occur, with parents orchestrating their participation (or lack thereof) in the available learning environments. Settings are seen in this approach as powerful socializing forces that, when systematically observed in relation to children’s behaviors, reveal cross-cultural patterns in, for example, the development of sex differences among children. For example, Edward and Whiting (1980) found that fewer sex differences exist in cultures where boys and girls were treated similarly with regard to childcare duties and other household and economic work. Where sex differences were greater (measured by social interaction along 15 dimensions), girls were more
frequently assigned to household tasks, including care of younger siblings, that kept
them close to home and in the company of adult females.

This research also moved systematic study of development beyond the mono-
cultural studies that dominated developmental research on children in psychology and
then projected the characteristics, processes, and outcomes of a primarily white,
Western childhood onto a primarily non-white, non-Western world. Edwards and
Whiting (1980) contend that a systematic, comparative approach to child socialization
provides a greater range of variation in behavior on which to test hypotheses about
development than is possible in single-culture samples. These authors argue that the
waning theoretical interest in socialization as a guiding framework in developmental
research in the 1970s and 80s should be viewed as a failure of mono-cultural research
strategies, rather than a fundamental problem with the model itself. Harkness (1980)
agrees that these studies, which intrinsically rendered culture as “invisible,” are
problematic in developmental research because: 1) the lack of differentiation between
the structure of the child’s development and the structure of the environment (i.e. “Is it
me or is it we?”); and 2) the degree of variation in individuals in these studies tends to
be greater than the degree of variation in their cultural contexts.

However, the Whitings’ and their colleagues’ treatment of the concept also
"relegated 'culture' to a residual category of background variables, and divested it of its
function as an integrative construct" (Harkness 1992:109). It required the
standardization across contexts of other variables (e.g., age, sibling order, sex) that had
to be "controlled" to allow for these systematic, statistical analyses. Differences in the
meaning of these constructs, however, and associated consequences for development
within and across cultural settings made such standardization intrinsically problematic
for valid comparative analyses. Further compromising the theoretical validity of the
Whittings’ work were subsequent empirically-based challenges to the construct of
personality and the primacy of early experience in determining the patterning of adult
behavior (Harkness 1992), leading to the eventual rejection of the Whitings’
functionalist model and the "culture and personality" school from which it developed as
anthropologists turned away from socialization as a paradigm for cross-cultural research
on children. Super and Harkness (1980) point out that in the era following WWII
anthropologists and psychologists interested in human development increasingly
diverged as anthropologists increasingly rejected the utility of psychological theories for
understanding human behavior at the level of culture and child development became
almost singularly identified with psychology and an individual level of analysis. The
Whittings’ research, according to these authors, renewed anthropological interest in the
relation between individual development and cultural context. Thus, the goal of
anthropologists studying human development and childhood became one of making
systematic investigations that were simultaneously sensitive to differences in meaning
and processes of child development.

While subject to the criticisms discussed above, the groundwork laid by the
extensive work of the Whitings spawned several generations of anthropological
research on child development and childhood, spurred in large part by their focused
conceptualization of the role of settings and cultural routines as the “proximate sources
of socialization” (Super and Harkness 1997:7). Their operationalization of learning theory also accorded children a more active role in the socialization process; children, rather than being seen as blank slates onto which culture was written in any wholesale manner, were viewed in this theoretical camp as active learners, as well as socializing agents of, for example, younger siblings. This treatment of children led the way for the eventual development of theoretical and methodological strategies, discussed in the sections that follow, to understand children as active participants not only in learning culture, but also in shaping it.

Childhood as Environment and Ecology

The work of the Whitings spawned a proliferation of research in comparative child development by several generations of students and colleagues (e.g., Harkness 1980; Harkness and Super 1980; Harkness 2006; Harkness 1992; LeVine 1980; LeVine 1989; LeVine 1998; LeVine 2008; LeVine 1988; LeVine 1977; LeVine 2010; Robert Levine et al. 1994; Super and Harkness 1980; Super 1997; Super and Harkness 1986; Weisner 2002a; Weisner 1996; Weisner, et al. 2001; Weisner 2001; Weisner 2002b; Weisner 2002c). Among the most important developments were the emergence of ecological frameworks for examining and understanding the cultural structuring of childhood in diverse environments. Super and Harkness (1986), for example, elaborated the concept of the developmental niche.

Super and Harkness proposed the developmental niche framework as a remedy to the shortcomings of childhood studies in anthropology and psychology at the time. They asserted that previous attempts to understand the role of environment in development did not generally acknowledge its cultural structuring, despite the primary role culture plays in human ecology. Sparked by Lewin’s field-theory of behavior and Barker and Wright’s ecological research on growing up in a Midwestern Kansas town, psychology witnessed a growing critique of the experimental method in child development research and a resurgence of theoretical and empirical attention to the contextual aspects of development from the 1950s to the 1970s. A key critique is McCall’s (1977) claim that experimental research had come to “dictate rather than serve” research questions in developmental psychology and call to study natural behavior in natural settings. On the other hand, Super and Harkness assert, anthropological approaches to culture and human development had been excessively oriented to the ‘final product’ in adulthood rather than focusing on developmental processes throughout the life-span. The components of their developmental niche “provide material from which the child abstracts the social, affective and cognitive rules of the culture, much as the rules of grammar are abstracted from the regularities of the speech environment” (1986:552). For example, in earlier empirical research these authors (1982) demonstrated that sleep patterns among infants in the U.S. and the Kipsigis of Kenya differentially co-vary with the structure of the physical environment (e.g., mats, cribs, chairs) and the social environment (i.e., types of caretakers and companions). Kipsigi babies slept less overall, waking every few hours and co-sleeping with parents longer into childhood than American infants. In subsequent research they found evidence of cultural patterning of gender segregation within peer groups, as well as differences in the allocation of children’s time on play and household work activities,
corresponding with differences in the developmental niches of children in these two societies.

The focus in the ecological framework of these and other anthropologists working in this paradigm is on how physical environment is mediated by cultural adaptations in the form of childcare practices and customs within the context of the technological and human resources available in any given child care environment. For example, Jean Briggs (1978) provides an ecological analysis of parenting and childhood with her ethnography of child-rearing strategies in a Canadian Inuit community. Briggs details with evidence collected during her 17 months of fieldwork how parenting goals and strategies promoted children’s emotional self-regulation, particularly of stress experiences (e.g., anger, aggression), at much earlier ages than is commonly seen in Western cultural contexts, and thus mitigated threats to children’s survival, as well as cultural survival, in the harsh Arctic environment. Such parenting practices and customs are so thoroughly integrated into what Super and Harkness term as the “parental ethnotheories” of child development and in any given culture that they do not need individual rationalization and are not necessarily given conscious thought. Although at the group level they can be seen as adaptations to the larger environment or ways of coping with developmental issues, they are more likely to be regarded by members of a culture as the ‘reasonable’ or ‘natural’ thing to do . . . [They are] not so much the immediate product of individual choice or personal disposition as they are community-wide solutions to recurrent issues in child rearing (Super and Harkness 1986:555).

Thus, the developmental niche provides a framework for examining the variable ways in which culture, as an adaptation to environmental constraints, mediates developmental processes and outcomes, in the form of physical settings, social goals, and parental beliefs.

Another key ecological framework used in ecological studies of children in anthropology is the work of Robert LeVine. A student of the Whitings, LeVine conducted research among the Gusii of Kenya and later among the Hausa of Nigeria and eventually proposed a universal hierarchy of parental goals for understanding the interaction of human biological and cultural evolution in the context of childcare and parental strategies (LeVine 1977; LeVine 1988; LeVine, et al. 1994; LeVine and LeVine 1988). This framework postulates that parental goals and their cultural childcare strategies are hierarchically geared to ensure 1) the physical survival and health of the child, including the normal development of the child’s reproductive capacity during puberty; 2) the development of the child’s behavioral capacity for economic self-maintenance in maturity; and 3) the development of the child’s behavioral capacities for maximizing other cultural values (e.g., prestige, wealth, religious piety, intellectual achievement) as formulated and symbolically elaborated in culturally distinctive beliefs, norms and ideologies (LeVine 1977). This framework focuses on what parents want for their children (i.e., goals), not what they want from them (e.g., labor), noting examples from
his research suggesting parental strategies for childcare and development, such as judgments about breastfeeding made on the basis of the infant’s size, are shaped by the environmental contexts of hazard and safety. While parental strategies for childcare are shaped by custom and have consequences for children’s psychological development, they also represent in this framework a cultural adaptation to environmental hazards and correspond to parental goals for child survival and subsequent development.

LeVine contends that parents, guided in their actions by these customs and cultural formulae, may be unable to explain their behavior to an inquiring outsider, which, he says, “is more adaptive than they are aware of or can put into words” (1977:20). But if parents cannot articulate the goals guiding their childcare behavior, then how do these behaviors evolve and become transmitted between generations over time within a society? LeVine suggests that in societies with high infant mortality rates, women with higher numbers of surviving children would have a greater opportunity to influence the childcare behaviors of subsequent generations and may also be seen by other, non-related individuals as models and sources of advice for childcare. Thus, over time more adaptive patterns would be socially selected for in cultural patterns and instantiated in ‘folk wisdom’ and childrearing customs (LeVine 1977).

Ogbu (1982) offers another important ecological perspective on comparative child study, one that lends itself to an applied approach in anthropology and child development. He critiques the 'process-product' paradigm of socialization research and argues that cultural ecology offers a more productive approach for understanding parental behavior, child socialization, and developmental outcomes. The process-product paradigm, he says, grew out of childrearing and development research in the 1960s and 1970s in which evidence of the lack of particular social competencies among poor and minority children in the U.S. was interpreted to reflect the presence or absence of particular types of family processes, specifically parent-child interaction. That is, correlations between specific social competencies of children (or lack thereof) and parent-child interaction were understood as constituting causal relationships, with resultant interventions focused on altering parent behavior in efforts to produce differential child development outcomes. Ogbu argues that this model is controverted by evidence of variation in these correlations within the U.S., as well as by cross-cultural data showing social competency (e.g., academic achievement) among children in vastly different childrearing contexts. Central to his argument is the assertion that the "products of childrearing" (developmental objectives) are shaped by the historical and contemporary sociopolitical and economic contexts in which they occur, rather than by skills or deficiencies in parents' explicit teaching abilities. Childrearing, he argues, "is culturally organized formulae which generally enable parents to successfully teach their children those language, cognitive, motivational and social competencies required to function competently in their culture . . . . [and] acquire those adaptive competencies consciously or unconsciously as they grow up" (1982:254, emphasis added). The key determinant of these formulae are the adult economic roles into which children are expected to develop in any given society or segment thereof. Finally, he contends that, contrary to the dominant model, childrearing practices do not cause children in different populations to develop different competencies, but the reverse. That is,
following Levine, he suggests that it is the (culturally formulated and organized) developmental objectives of parents that produce differential childrearing strategies and outcomes. As such, it would be methodologically and theoretically invalid to measure the efficacy of childrearing practices of one population on the basis of the developmental objectives (desired competencies) of another. Thus, socialization research that casts its widest lens on parents’ childrearing skills and practices will yield an unrealistically narrow frame of reference on the total ecology of child socialization and the factors that influence parenting behavior and developmental outcomes.

To correct this analytic shortcoming, Ogbu argues that cultural ecology—first articulated by Julian Steward in his theory of multilinear cultural evolution (1955)—provides a framework in which to examine the interrelationships between diverse environments and the differential patterns of behavior with which populations adapt to them, facilitated by the exploitation (use) of available technology and knowledge. Ogbu notes that it is not primarily the natural environment but the technological, social, political, and economic environments to which “modern” industrial societies adapt, which he terms as “technoeconomic” (263). Because resources (e.g., jobs, opportunities for advancement) within these environments have historically and contemporaneously been unevenly distributed, certain groups (e.g., African-Americans) are forced to occupy marginal "ecological habitats" and therefore develop differential "strategies for exploiting social resources within the environment" (264). Following the model outlined above, then, these differential environments or habitats place particular psychological and behavioral demands on parents and, in turn, influence their childrearing goals or "culturally organized formulae" by which children are socialized to function as competent members of their social worlds. Ogbu concludes that unless research aims to understand how these goals are organized by the sociopolitical and economic environments in which families are embedded, little substantive insight will develop about why particular groups socialize children as they do.

Thus ecological frameworks advanced the anthropological gaze on socialization and development with theoretical and empirical attention to the contexts in which children “come of age.” However, children’s voices did not enter the anthropological canon of literature on childhood until social constructionist and interpretive paradigms developed. The emergence of these paradigms coincided with the rise of interest across the social sciences in child wellbeing in the last decades of the 20th century. Literature on these developments in anthropological childhood studies is reviewed below.

3.3 Child Wellbeing and Children as Social Actors

In the last few decades, anthropologists have increasingly sought to understand the diverse systems of meaning that shape children’s lives and through which children become active and engaged participants in social life. Of particular importance to anthropologists working within this interpretive and social constructionist paradigm have been efforts to understand children as social actors, elaborated theoretically and empirically by various anthropologists. Underpinning this work is the assumption that not only do various environments differently guide social and cultural goals for children’s development, so too are children’s lives differentially shaped by the processes by which they themselves take up these goals (or do not) and reinterpret them. These
developments have paralleled efforts in the social sciences at large to reconcile the theoretical tension between structure and agency and to understand the mechanisms by which the objects of social scientific inquiry are instantiated in cultural practice (Modell 1996).

For example, Corsaro and Miller’s (1992:6) edited volume on interpretive approaches in children’s socialization addresses this tension by asking: “How do children come to invest cultural resources with meaning?” In this work, for the first time, childhood is seen as a ground for cultural negotiation and creativity, not only between adult caretakers and the larger environments that constrain and guide them, but between children and their social worlds. Corsaro (1990; 1992) builds on Gidden’s theory of structuration with the notion of childhood as a ‘productive-reproductive’ process. For Corsaro, socialization (development) is not a private, individual process, but a public, collective one. He sees this interpretive paradigm of childhood study as differing from conventional views of socialization and development in several respects, primarily in that it sees language and children’s participation in cultural routines as key tools and contexts in and through which socialization occurs. From this perspective “the child is not only alive, but socially alive—a participant in negotiation with others . . . in the communal events that are the basis of shared culture” (Corsaro 1996:419, emphasis added). This approach and its focus on children’s participation in cultural routines provides an extended lens on traditional, linear theories of child development by elucidating the social-reproductive aspects of development, that is, not only how children become part of adult culture (traditional views) but also contribute to the production and reproduction of culture through their active negotiations with social expectations and their participation in continually evolving peer cultures.

The social constructionist approach to childhood developed by James and colleagues (for example, James 1990; James 1993; James 1995; James 1998; James, et al. 1998; Jenks 1993; Jenks 1995; Jenks 1996; Prout and James 1990) in British anthropology and sociology is one of the most significant theoretical developments in comparative child studies. From this perspective childhood is seen as a social and cultural, rather than universal, phenomenon and an exploration of children’s experiences is key to understanding childhood. Within sociology and anthropology social constructionists have taken several approaches, including documenting how ‘the child’ has been symbolized historical and culturally. Jenks (1993; 1995; 1996), for example, points out that in Western societies the child has come to represent ‘futurity’ and a "growing sensitivity to the idea that children, being different from adults, require special treatment and care and that the importance of children lies in the future with they represent" (quoted in James 1998:49). Studies of the cultural construction of childhood include Briggs’ (1992) research on the socialization of meaning in childhood among the Canadian Inuit, as well as Prout’s (1986; 1988) studies of the sick role and help-seeking behavior among British schoolchildren. Taken together, these show a broad diversity of conceptions of and expectations/goals for ‘the child’ in society. James points out that if childhood were unproblematically a biological (i.e., natural) phase of development then discussions such as Postman’s (1982) argument for the disappearance of childhood would be nonsensical. Postman argues that the category of
the child is disappearing in modern society as a result of the erosion of distinctions between children and adults in everything from fashion to legal sanctions for criminal acts. The foundation for his thesis rests on Aries’ (1962) historical study of childhood and controversial assertion, roughly stated here, that childhood as a distinct social category arose as a result of the rise and expansion of capitalist modes of production and accompanying shifts in technological and social organization. Though his assertion that Medieval Europeans had no conception of the child has been strongly contested by many, including James, Aries is still widely credited with introducing the idea that childhood as we know it did not always exist and is subject to historical change. Although children have and always will be recognized apart from the older members of their societies, the characteristics attributed to them (including both abilities and inabilities) have and will vary across cultures. Central tenets of this emerging paradigm are as follows: 1) childhood is understood as a social construction and “provides an interpretive frame for understanding the early years of human life. In these terms it is biological immaturity rather than childhood which is a universal and natural feature of human groups, for ways of understanding this period of human life - the institutions of childhood - vary cross-culturally although they do form a specific structural and cultural component of all known societies” (James 1990:3); 2) childhood "as a variable of social analysis, can never be entirely separated from other variables such as class, gender or ethnicity" (James 1990 3); 3) childhood and children's relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right and not just as reflected or constructed by adults; that is, children are active participants in and contributors to their social worlds and not "simply the passive subjects of structural determinations" (James 1990:4); 4) in taking seriously children's agency in their own development and social existence, ethnography becomes a central methodological tool for accessing and representing children's perspectives and experiences; and, finally, 5) the new paradigm necessarily involves reconstructing childhood in society as, for example, in Woodhead’s (1990) critical analysis of the social construction of children's needs and the implicit assumptions that needs discourse carries regarding adequate parenting and appropriate activities for children. These developments have been the foci of several conferences and large research efforts in Europe, including the European Initiative for the Study of Childhood led by Jens Qvortrup.

James (1998) traces the notion that children are social actors to Charlotte Hardman’s (1973) article arguing that children are capable informants about childhood and "might be seen as possessing their own culture," apart from that of adults, that should be accessed through children directly as a means of opening up scholarship on their contributions to the socialization process. James points out that it is a small step from Hardman's claim of children's culture (with a capital C) to the assertion that there are multiple children's cultures (with a small c) around the world, but suggests that insufficient comparative data on this yet exists. She says that the available data suggests that less separation exists between children and adults in non-Western regions where children's labor is essential to household survival, or where they work autonomously (i.e., without direct adult supervision) as, for example, health workers. She contends that what "a child-centred (sic) approach to . . . the study of children's lives has achieved
is a radically changed focus on 'childhood' . . . . [showing] what the world looks like through children's rather than adults’ eyes . . . " (James 1998:52).

As anthropologists such as James and Prout aimed to include children’s voices in representations of their lives, changes were taking place in global research on children’s health and wellbeing. The 1960s saw the emergence of the social indicators movement and with it the first systematic efforts to measure quality of life on national and international scales. Early efforts to measure children’s quality of life focused primarily on survival and negative outcomes (e.g., mortality) (Ben-Arieh 2008). Initial efforts to monitor children’s status worldwide (e.g., UNICEF Annual State of the World’s Children Report) have gone only part of the way toward remedying the shortcomings of early child research (Ben-Arieh, et al. 2001; Kajanoja 2002; Qvortrup 1990). Ironically, children are often not the unit of analysis in research on their own wellbeing. As such, they are “often considered as objects and not as subjects, persons and citizens” (Ben-Arieh, et al. 2001:xiii) in these studies. Households, families, schools, and communities are frequently taken to represent the wellbeing of children, and their status is often measured only by proxy of their parents or teachers, rather than directly. Such research obscures intra-familial and other variability in the economic, social, and other wellbeing of individuals—including children—who live within them. Standard measures of, for example, household income or parental employment may not accurately depict the status of children who may or may not benefit from these resources. And while often adults are prolific informants about the children in their charge, their accounts of children’s experiences often differ substantially from those provided by children for themselves. Ben-Arieh and colleagues (2001) point out, children’s interests may differ from those of their families and communities and development of accurate knowledge and appropriate interventions (i.e., programs and policies) require an understanding of the children’s experiences and the changes they face.

In 2013, children are the last remaining social group in Western societies for whom such “research by proxy” is considered scientifically or ethically acceptable in the social sciences, and that acceptability has come under serious critique. No other class of people would be considered adequately protected, nor deemed to have been scientifically represented or empirically understood, without due diligence being given to procedures of informed consent and collection of evidence that they themselves provide. According to Part C Section 3 of the Belmont Report, “social justice requires that distinction be drawn between classes of subjects that ought, and ought not, to participate in any particular kind of research, based on the ability of members of that class to bear burdens and on the appropriateness of placing further burdens on already burdened persons.” One might argue, then, that as long as they are able to bear the burdens of the studies in which they are involved, children are done an injustice if they are not directly included in studies about the status of their own lives and wellbeing. Qvortrup (1990) argues that giving children a voice in social research would provide important information about their life conditions that is not adequately reflected in information on their parents.

Along these lines, promising currents of contemporary childhood studies in anthropology and sociology parallel broader efforts in the social sciences to reconcile
theoretical tension between structure and agency (see, e.g., Corsaro and Miller 1992 for an application of Gidden’s theory of structuration to child socialization). A growing body of research (e.g., James, et al. 1998; Jenks 1993; Prout and James 1990) views development as a productive-reproductive process and eschews process-product models that treat children as "simply the passive subjects of structural determinations" (James 1990:4). This methodological stance treats children as meaningful participants in the “communal events that are the basis of shared culture” (Corsaro 1996:419) who actively negotiate with adults in the production of sociocultural and economic lifeways. This approach rejects deterministic explanations and seeks instead to understand how children differently “experience and constitute the social world, while at the same time transforming it” (Norman 1999). From this perspective, the central question in any study of culture and human development, as Corsaro and Miller (1996:6) suggest, is “How do children come to invest cultural resources with meaning?”

From the perspective of psychologist Barbara Rogoff and colleagues (2003; 2007), human development occurs by youths taking part in and, by doing so, transforming culture, in a synergistic relationship of human development and sociocultural change. Youths are not socialized into society by passively receiving cultural information and instruction from parents, teachers, and others. Rather, development occurs in a “process of transformation through participation in sociocultural activities”(Rogoff, et al. 1995:56). Youths develop through participation in shared activities until they become increasingly competent and central members of their cultural communities, which also undergo continual change through this generational succession of activity. In this framework, youths and society are mutually constitutive and inseparable in a fundamentally dynamic and co-creative process. Youths are—through their engagement with cultural activities—literally and symbolically the means by which society and culture are made and re-made one generation at a time. Therefore, an analysis of how youths engage physically, socially, and symbolically with key cultural activities is critical to understanding not only their wellbeing and development but the wellbeing and evolution of society. This theoretical stance fits well with the practical concerns and perspectives of contemporary Alaska Native elders shared with me on my early trips to Nondalton about the importance (and possible decline) of youth engagement with traditional Dena’ina activities, particularly those associated with living on the land, or subsistence.

It follows, then, that research on children’s experiences and engagement in cultural activities, such as subsistence hunting and fishing, comprises a particularly useful tool for assessing the status of children under conditions of rapid social change as well as the influences of such change on developmental pathways. The social constructionist approach provides a useful stance from which to assess children’s wellbeing and the transition to adulthood under conditions of rapid social change, as discussed further below.

**Pathways of Positive Development**

Since Durkheim’s famous essay on suicide (May and Winkle 1994), social scientists have concerned themselves with the subjects of personal satisfaction and quality of life (Felt and Sinclair 1991). Led by Bauer (1966), these interests gave rise to
the social indicators movement in the 1960s, resulting in the increasing quantification of life quality through indexes of myriad social domains, such as housing, education, and health. As defined by Biderman (1966) and discussed by Ben-Arie and colleagues (2001:4), social indicators are “quantitative data that serve as indexes to socially important conditions of the society.”

Following the assumption that industrial development (i.e., modernization) necessarily led to higher standards of living, social and economic researchers have often treated measures of material life conditions as valid proxies for subjective wellbeing (Felt and Sinclair 1991). Anthropologists have, for decades, challenged assumptions that material wealth or processes of modernization can reasonably be equated with life satisfaction and other dimensions of wellbeing (e.g., Sahlins 1972). These critiques assert that the accumulation of wealth, industrial development, and modernization do not invariably or uni-dimensionally correspond with happiness, life satisfaction, or health (Felt and Sinclair 1991) and have contributed to growing interest in subjective wellbeing. This interest has spurred efforts to craft reliable and valid measures of subjective wellbeing, to correlate subjective and objective measures of wellbeing, and to the consideration of the universality and comparability of subjective wellbeing across sociohistorical contexts (e.g., Gullone and Cummins 2002). Recently, interest in subjective wellbeing has extended to children and the recognition of the “failure to measure the state of children beyond survival or their basic needs” (Ben-Arie, et al. 2001:xxi).

Research on children’s subjective wellbeing fits well within the sociological interest in children as social actors, discussed above. Both streams of childhood studies: (1) consider children to represent a distinct population group in society; (2) point to a dearth of information on the status of children around the globe in diverse social and economic contexts; and (3) consider children’s own perspectives paramount for understanding and improving their status within and across societies (Ben-Arie, et al. 2001; Qvortrup 1990). Studies of children’s wellbeing that take children as the “unit of analysis” and treat them as subjects, rather than objects, of inquiry have several theoretical and practical advantages. First, focusing on the activities and experiences of children while they are children allows for examination of how sociocultural change may impact different segments of the population differently (Ben-Arie, et al. 2001). Second, such studies will provide a more detailed picture of how childhood, as a distinct stage of the life course, is experienced and apprehended differently by various cohorts of children within and between social and historical contexts. To this point, state-level reports and large-scale surveys have increasingly been complemented by a growing trend toward efforts to measure and monitor subjective wellbeing at the level of the community or region (Ben-Arie, et al. 2001; Felt and Sinclair 1991).

Most recently, interdisciplinary research on children’s wellbeing has begun exploring pathways of positive development, favoring indicators of health and resilience over traditional markers of pathology and risk. For example, the Search Institute has developed the Developmental Asset Model, including 40 indicators of healthy child development culled from research with children across the U.S. The model includes external indicators, or positive experiences and support young people receive from the
world around them (e.g., positive family communication), and internal indicators, or characteristics and behaviors that reflect positive internal growth and development of young people (e.g., positive view of personal future). Ben-Arieh and colleagues (2001) argue for selection of positive indicators that further knowledge about children’s “strengths, satisfaction and realization of opportunities” and facilitate policy and program development that goes beyond “the elimination of risk...[to] advance the societal responsibility to promote genuine wellbeing” (Ben-Arieh, et al. 2001:40). Use of positive indicators thus moves the research on children’s wellbeing beyond a narrow focus on risk, deviance, and threats to survival to consider healthy growth and development more broadly as encompassing children’s satisfaction and the realization of opportunities. Burgeoning interest in positive indicators of children’s wellbeing has recently spawned several major research initiatives, myriad publications, and a national conference devoted entirely to the topic (see, e.g., McNeely 2003; Scales and Benson 2003; Snyder 2003).

For this study, the measurement of children’s subjective wellbeing was approached from a contextual perspective. First articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and developed further in social ecological models of human development, a contextual perspective “emphasizes the interactions among the individual, family, peer group, activity setting...residential neighborhood, the broader community and society at large,...[each of which is a] social unit that shares space, patterned interaction, collective perception of boundaries and identity, and shared feelings of belonging” (Ben-Arieh, et al. 2001:103). As such, a nexus of family and community factors create environments in which children experience opportunities and obstacles to the realization of positive developmental outcomes. Although Ben-Arieh and colleagues (2001:40) suggest five domains and a host of indicators with which to organize research efforts, they caution against using a single theoretical framework due to the “heavily culturally contingent” definition of children’s wellbeing, suggesting that the indicators chosen for a particular study must depend on the specific research objectives. The objectives of this dissertation research were to understand the contemporary life experience of Dena’ina youth and the role of traditional cultural activities of Dena’ina life—particularly subsistence—in their wellbeing and expectations for the future. Indicators of children’s subjective wellbeing were identified from several conceptual frameworks for this dissertation. These frameworks and the selected measures for assessing Dena’ina youths’ subjective wellbeing are discussed in Chapter 4 on the methodological approach and design of the study.

Community-Engaged Research

In the past several decades, research has increasingly occurred in which communities and the individuals that comprise them are not just subjects of research but actively participate in shaping and implementing it, as well as having full or shared ownership and control of the knowledge generated. These methodologies, such as the approach known as community-based participatory research (CBPR), have collectively emerged as a prominent paradigm of community-engaged research and are now commonly used in public health and other types of research conducted with indigenous communities (Israel, et al. 2001).
Various approaches to community-engaged research grew from the roots of early participatory and action research approaches developed by social scientists, such as Kurt Lewin (1946) in psychology, Paolo Freire (1970) in education, and Budd Hall in education (1984), who viewed research and social action as essentially linked and advocated for researchers to partner with community members, especially in contexts of oppression and disparity, in the development and discovery of scientific knowledge for the protection and benefit of the community. Collectively, these methodologies strive for equity in the process and outcomes of research conducted in communities that historically have not been included as valued partners in the research endeavor. Such communities often have, at best, not benefitted from and, at worst, been harmed by the trove of information taken and disseminated outside the community by researchers using traditional paradigms of research.

Anthropologists, particularly those working in the areas of health, education, environment, and economic development, have played a central role in the development of these methodologies that seek to controvert “top-down” approaches to research, as well as health, social policy, and community development (see, for example, Campbell and Lassiter 2010; Johnston 2010; Mullins 2011; Sillitoe and Marzano 2009; Tilt 2011; Waterson and Behera 2011). A community-engaged approach was taken in this dissertation study. A community-based participatory approach, in which community members are involved in every phase of the research from design to analysis to dissemination, was not used for this study; however, the research questions emerged directly from conversations with community members and the research was undertaken with community consent in the form of tribal council approval and endorsement. In addition, community members were engaged throughout the research process, for example, in providing content for interview protocols and feedback on preliminary findings. This community-engaged approach was adopted in this study with an awareness and respect for the history of unequal and changing relations between anthropologists (and all researchers) and the indigenous communities in which we have worked (e.g., Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997a; Harrison 2001; Mihesuah 1998) and the need to recognize and right the balance of power in these relationships (Smith 1999).
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Ethnography is the most important method in the study of human development because it ensures that the cultural place will be incorporated into understanding development (Weisner 1996:305-6).

4.1 Introduction
This chapter describes the methodological approach and design of the study. The research was conducted in Southwest Alaska in the Dena’ina Athabascan village of Nondalton with approval and written permission from the Nondalton Tribal Council and the Case Western Reserve University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research was designed as an ethnographic, community-engaged study of Alaska Native youth coming of age in rural Alaska in the early 21st century. Purposive sampling was used, and data collection took place over one year during seven site visits. Mixed-methods were utilized, including: participant-observation, surveys, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. All surveys and interviews were conducted in English. This study sought to answer three research questions:

1. How do contemporary Dena’ina youths engage with subsistence and other traditional cultural activities?

2. How do Dena’ina youths perceive their wellbeing in and across multiple life domains?

3. What role does subsistence and other traditional cultural activities play in Dena’ina youths’ wellbeing and aspirations for the future?

The methodological approach is briefly reviewed below, followed by a description of the research site and setting, sampling, data collection and analytic procedures, and ethical considerations.

4.2 Approach

Social Constructionism
Since the Whitings’ Six Cultures Project, discussed in Chapter 3, anthropologists have increasingly sought better methods with which to learn about and understand the diverse cultural systems of meaning that shape children’s lives and through which children become increasingly active and central participants in social life. This research was approached from this social constructionist, interpretive paradigm with the concordant assumption that children and youth are important social actors who not only learn culture, but who shape and create it through an iterative process of learning and participation in cultural activity (LeVine 2011; Rogoff, et al. 1995). This paradigm fits well with the objectives of this study, to study the role of cultural activities in Dena’ina youth wellbeing and future goals, with an emphasis on paying attention to youths’ own experiences and perspectives rather than attempting to understand their status through adult proxies.
Community-Engaged Research

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study used a community engaged approach. The research was designed and implemented with community consent and community participation, for the mutual benefit of community members and the researcher, and with an ecological approach to understanding and improving the long-term health and wellbeing of the community and, in particular, its youth. Active and ongoing engagement of the community in the research project was the most appropriate methodological approach for this study, with its focus on positive factors in the subjective wellbeing of Dena’ina youth and their active involvement in generating that knowledge, just as they participate in actively shaping and reshaping their social world.

4.3 Data Collection

Participants and recruitment

The participant sample for this dissertation consists of 19 Dena’ina Athabascan youths between the ages of 10 and 19 years who lived in Nondalton during the entire data collection period. As discussed in Chapter 3, definitions of adolescence have varied substantially across time and social contexts. Settersten and Ray (2010), members of the MacArthur Foundation’s Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood and Public Policy, define contemporary adolescence as extending into the late 20s and even 30s, due to the intentional delay by many young people in achieving “touch points of adulthood” such as college, independent living, marriage, and savings (Dwyer 2011). However, these milestones of adulthood have not been considered desirable or appropriate in Alaska Native social contexts, in which the transition from childhood to adulthood (adolescence) has historically been marked by learning the skills necessary for living on the land (not going to college), maintaining interdependent relationships within a large social network (not a nuclear family), and accumulating only resources needed to survive and maintain social relationships (not amassing excess individual wealth). The markers of the transition to adulthood may be shifting in Alaska Native societies as increasing numbers of youths leave their home communities to attend college or seek employment, establish households away from their immediate (and sometimes even extended) families, and intentionally delay or forego parenthood altogether. However, the age range for this study was chosen with recognition that, to the extent this shift is happening at all, it is still a relatively new phenomenon and rural Alaska Native youths may still be, to a great extent, experiencing a relatively earlier transition to adulthood, or adolescence, than many of their non-Native and/or urban peers.

The age range of 10 to 19 years was purposively selected to include the views and experiences of adolescents in the village who were likely to be enrolled in secondary school, as school was one of the key life domains about which youth participants were interviewed, and in recent years it has been common for youths to remain in school at least until the age of 19 and sometimes longer (personal communication). A complete sample of all Dena’ina youths in this age range living in Nondalton was sought. At the start of data collection, a preliminary census showed that there were 25 Dena’ina youths ages 10 to 19 living in Nondalton. Five additional
Nondalton youths ages 10 to 19 of Dena’ina descent were reported as living and attending school outside the village. Three resident youths in the age range were not of Dena’ina descent and were thus excluded from the sample. One youth turned 10 years of age during the data collection period, bringing the number of Dena’ina youths ages 10 to 19 living in the village to 26. As shown in Table 4.1, 19 youths (73% of the population) were approached and either consented (18 to 19 years old) or assented (10 to 17 years old) with parental consent to participate in the research. Of the eligible males in the community (n=11), 90% agreed to participate in the research. One younger male assented but did not have parental consent and so was not able to participate. Of the eligible females (n=15), 60% agreed to participate in the study. By contrast, the study sample was comprised of 53% males (n=10) and 47% females (n=9); thus, females were slightly underrepresented in the sample in comparison to the population. Five youths were approached and either declined to participate or declined to respond after initially indicating interest in the research. Two youths were not approached due to lack of opportunity to build the rapport necessary to extend an invitation to participate.

Methods
Methods used in the study included participant-observation, surveys, and interviews, both unstructured and semi-structured (Table 4.2). Participant-observation was used to understand the context of youths’ daily lives across the seasonal cycle (spring, summer, fall, winter) and to gain knowledge and experience related to

Table 4.1: Eligible participants and non-participants by age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male N (%)</th>
<th>Female N (%)</th>
<th>Both Genders N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age 10-14</td>
<td>Age 14-19</td>
<td>Age 10-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible and did assent and/or consent to participate</td>
<td>2 (8)</td>
<td>8 (31)</td>
<td>4 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible and did not assent and/or consent to participate, or withdrew after enrolling</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible and not approached</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All eligible youths</td>
<td>11 (42)</td>
<td>15 (58)</td>
<td>26 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2: Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Participant type</th>
<th>Content/context of data collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant-observation</td>
<td>Youths, families, elders, and other community members</td>
<td>Fish camps, homes, school events (e.g., culture week, Native Youth Olympics, sporting events), community events (e.g., Orthodox Russian New Year; winter carnival)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys and Questionnaires</td>
<td>Youths</td>
<td>Life satisfaction; cultural heritage, activities/experiences, and values; daily routines and activities; future aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Youths, parents, elders, tribal leaders, health aides, teachers</td>
<td>Factors affecting youth wellbeing; youth subjective wellbeing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

subsistence and other activities, as well as issues affecting cultural patterns or other community factors that may affect youths’ activities, wellbeing, and aspirations for the future. Surveys were used to obtain quantitative data on youths’ subjective wellbeing in five life domains (family, friends, school, self, and community), their cultural heritage and experiences, daily routines and activities, and future aspirations for participation in subsistence and other activities. Unstructured interviews were conducted in the preliminary stage of fieldwork with parents, elders, and other adults in the community (community health aides, teachers) to gather data on locally valued and relevant factors of youth wellbeing, as well as throughout the year with parents and other community members for the purpose of understanding local issues affecting youths and families. Finally, a series of semi-structured interviews in six life domains—those listed above, plus culture—were conducted with youths to collect data on subjective wellbeing.

Fieldwork

Data was collected from April 2008 to May 2009 during seven trips to Nondalton totaling six months’ of residence in the village. Field stays ranged from two to six weeks each. The research was self-funded. The data collection techniques used included a subjective wellbeing survey, a background questionnaire, a series of semi-structured Ecocultural Family Interviews (EFI) in six life domains, an aspirations survey, and participant observation. The number of instruments completed by participant gender is provided in Table 4.3. A total of 77 EFI interviews were conducted with 15 youths in the sample, and 15 youths completed the background questionnaire (4 youths chose not to participate in interviews at all and 4 youths did not complete the background questionnaire survey). This resulted in uneven distribution of data collected across the sample and is a limitation of the dataset.

Interviews were conducted by domain (e.g., family, school, etc.) in multiple meetings with each youth. Each youth was reminded in each meeting about the six domains (friends, family, self, school, community, and culture) and asked which domain(s) s/he wished to discuss in that conversation. Some youths chose to discuss some domains but not others over the entire period of data collection. Table 4.3 shows
Table 4.3: Data collected by instrument and participant gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Male (N=10) N (%)</th>
<th>Female (N=9) N (%)</th>
<th>All (N=19) N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction survey</td>
<td>10 (100)</td>
<td>9 (100)</td>
<td>19 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations questionnaire</td>
<td>10 (100)</td>
<td>6 (67)</td>
<td>16 (84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background questionnaire</td>
<td>7 (70)</td>
<td>8 (89)</td>
<td>15 (79)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-structured interview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Male (N=10) N (%)</th>
<th>Female (N=9) N (%)</th>
<th>All (N=19) N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School domain</td>
<td>10 (100)</td>
<td>4 (44)</td>
<td>14 (74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self domain</td>
<td>10 (100)</td>
<td>2 (22)</td>
<td>12 (63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family domain</td>
<td>10 (100)</td>
<td>3 (33)</td>
<td>13 (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends domain</td>
<td>9 (90)</td>
<td>3 (33)</td>
<td>12 (63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community domain</td>
<td>9 (90)</td>
<td>4 (44)</td>
<td>13 (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture domain</td>
<td>9 (90)</td>
<td>4 (44)</td>
<td>13 (68)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the participation of youths in these interviews as well as in a subjective wellbeing survey and the aspirations questionnaire. Participant observation was conducted in a variety of settings. In addition to data collected from youth participants, unstructured interviews were conducted with parents, elders, tribal leaders, and other adult members of the village and neighboring areas.

Flyers were posted with the permission of the Nondalton Tribal Council for an open meeting at the Nondalton Community Center to introduce residents to the research, answer questions, and address any expressed concerns. Approximately 10 community members (6% of the population) attended the meeting, including two elders and several youths. Following the meeting, a census was taken of households in the community to determine the number and location of youths eligible to participate in the research. The four eligibility requirements included: (1) being 10 to 19 years of age; (2) being of Dena’ina Athabascan and/or other Alaska Native descent; (3) having lived in the community for at least one year; and (4) providing informed consent or child assent with parental consent to participate if youth under age 18. Visits were also made early in the data collection period to the school, health clinic, tribal council office, and city office to build rapport with staff, inform additional community members about the research, and conduct unstructured interviews to gather contextual information about community services and infrastructure.

Life Satisfaction Survey

Every youth participating in the research completed the Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Survey (MSLSS), developed by psychologist Scott Huebner and colleagues (Gilman 2000; Huebner and Gilman 2002). The MSLSS, presented in Appendix A, is a 40-item, self-report instrument that measures subjective wellbeing in youths overall and in the life domains of: (1) school, (2) self, (3) family, (4) friends, and (5) living environment (Huebner 1994; Huebner 1998a). Huebner and colleagues developed the MSLSS to a measure of subjective youth life satisfaction that is sensitive to specific life domains as well as provides a measure of overall life satisfaction. These authors also aimed to develop a scale with a replicable factor structure, thereby validating the
meaningfulness of the five domains, that could be used with children in a wide range of ages, abilities, and learning contexts (Huebner and Gilman 2002). The age range (10-19 years) of youths participating in this study may slightly exceed that of the study samples (grades 3-12) on which the MSLSS was validated, although all youths in the current study were enrolled in school or pursuing a GED through the data collection period, except for one youth who completed a GED during the study.

Cross-national studies with samples of children in the Southern U.S., Canada, and Korea (Greenspoon 1997; Huebner 1998a; Park, et al. 2004) have shown good internal consistency (reliability) and test-retest coefficients and have supported the dimensional, hierarchical model of life satisfaction and positive correlations with other measures of self- and other-reported subjective child and adolescent wellbeing (validity) in all five domains except for living environment (Huebner and Gilman 2002). A comparative study of White and Black children in the Southeastern U.S., undertaken to test the cross-racial reliability and validity of the instrument, also indicated a need for some caution in interpreting sub-scale results, especially in the Self domain, across groups that may have differential formation of self-concept and organization (Huebner 1998b).

Youths completing the MSLSS were asked to think about the past several weeks in their lives and then respond to 40 items on a 6-point (1-6) Likert-type scale with possible answers ranging from ‘agree’ to ‘disagree’ with the three modifiers ‘slightly’, ‘somewhat’, and ‘strongly’. Each youth was provided six cards, each card listing one of the possible answers, and asked to select the card that best answered each item. Each survey was prefaced with a reminder to the youth that there were no right or wrong answers, only the best answer for each individual on each question. Wording on three items was slightly modified from Huebner’s original scale. On items 31, 37, and 39, the words ‘neighbor’, ‘neighbors’, and ‘neighborhood’ were changed to ‘people in this village’ or ‘village’ to accommodate the fact that the concept of neighborhoods is not especially meaningful in Nondalton and that the village as a whole is arguably a ‘neighborhood’ and the villagers are viewed and view themselves as ‘neighbors’ in the broader areas of the Lake Clark-Lake Iliamna or Lake and Peninsula Borough or Dena’ina communities.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Youths were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol modeled on the principles of Weisner and colleagues’ Ecocultural Family Interview (EFI) (1997), the structure of the life satisfaction survey, and the content of the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets framework (Benson 2002a). The EFI is an open-ended, semi-structured conversation that covers a broad range of topics related to a family’s daily routines (such as meals, school, work, time together). Respondents are encouraged to ‘tell their story’ about raising their children and dealing with all the many problems in and supports for maintaining their daily routine of life. The interview format...allows family members to discuss topics that are of greatest concern to them....encouraging them to reflect on what they are doing and where they are going (Weisner 2002a:278).
The EFI is a method of inquiry to elicit information about family and youth routines and activities and, as such, is not a specific instrument. It was not used in analysis and interpretation of the data; rather it was used to develop the interview format and questions.

Interview questions were grouped into the same five life domains used in the MSLSS survey plus the additional (sixth) domain of culture. Culture was added to the domain structure to obtain information about youths’ experiences with cultural activities (e.g., subsistence fishing) that might not be elicited by questions in the other five categories, as well as to gain information about their experiences and views on other key aspects of Dena’ina culture (e.g., identification with Athabascan beliefs and values). The semi-structured interview protocol was constructed in two parts, including 1) a closed-ended background questionnaire and 2) a series of open-ended questions. Appendix B presents the background questionnaire, which surveyed youths about their demographic, family and tribal background, activities and routines, and subjective identification with normative Dena’ina cultural values. Open-ended interviews surveyed youths’ views and experiences in each of the six life domains with questions modeled on the “community-based human development” approach developed by Peter Benson and colleagues at the Search Institute (2002a; 2002). This approach is:

- a relatively new conceptualization of positive human development, synthesizing contextual and individual factors that, when present, serve to protect from, or inhibit, health-compromising behavior and enhance the opportunity for positive developmental outcomes (Benson 2002a, emphasis added).

The empirical basis for this approach to studying positive youth development is the extensive research by Benson and colleagues (see, for example, Benson 2002b; Benson, et al. 2002; Scales and Benson 2003; Scales, et al. 2008; Scales, et al. 2006) that has consistently found direct, linear correlations between positive adolescent outcomes and the cumulative presence of 40 “developmental assets” (Benson 2002b). In surveys with more than a half-million youths in grades 6 through 12 in the Lower 48 U.S., these researchers found that, on average, the more assets young people have, the more likely they are to express positive behaviors (e.g., danger avoidance, academic achievement) and experience favorable health outcomes. Conversely, the fewer assets they have, the more likely they are to exhibit risky behaviors and experience negative outcomes, such as problem alcohol use and suicide. This research suggests that when enough cumulative assets are present in youths’ lives, resilience and positive outcomes can occur “even among individuals involved in many of the high risk behaviors linked to poverty” or other challenging environments (Taylor, et al. 2002:58). The 40 assets were used in this study as a priori themes for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting interview and survey data. These themes are presented in Appendix C and defined in the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6.
Open-ended questions for interviews were constructed in three stages. In the first stage, unstructured interviews were conducted with parents and other adult members (e.g., elders, teachers, health aides) of the community during a preliminary visit to the community to elicit normative local knowledge and perspectives about the role of cultural activities and other salient factors in youth wellbeing. In the second stage, the six life domains were operationally defined. In the final stage, open-ended questions in each of the six primary domains were developed to survey and explore in-depth the Dena’ina youths’ views and experiences related to (1) the 40 developmental assets (a priori themes of youth wellbeing) and (2) locally-relevant and valued factors of wellbeing suggested by data collected during the preliminary stage of fieldwork (emergent themes of youth wellbeing). The qualitative interview protocol is provided in Appendix D. The interview was comprised of open-ended questions and was used not to quantitatively measure youths’ developmental assets, but rather to elicit information about the quality and meaning of these factors in their lives from their perspectives.

Interviews were conducted individually and in groups with other participating youths, if participating youths preferred to meet with peers present and everyone consented and/or assented. While the initial study protocol did not call for group interviews, it became apparent over the year of fieldwork that some youths, especially those who were typically “shy”, were more clearly more comfortable conversing in groups with peers than in one-on-one interviews; in particular, youths seemed more willing to discuss difficult topics (e.g., family or community problems) in groups than individually. Thus, while this adjustment to the interview procedures may have introduced a social desirability bias, in that youths responses may have been altered by the presence of peers, I believe that it ultimately resulted in higher participation and yielded more and higher quality data than would have otherwise been gathered.

Interviews were audio-taped with youth consent or youth assent and parental permission, depending on age of the participant. All interviews were conducted in English. Interviews occurred in a studio apartment I rented from a local family for the duration of data collection, or on walks with youths around the village and surrounding area when they preferred to be outside. Throughout the year of data collection, youths visited the apartment individually and in groups for scheduled or spontaneous interviews or solely to visit (i.e., not for research) while out walking, playing, or “visiting around” to friends.

**Aspirations Questionnaire**

A 60-item aspirations questionnaire was constructed to acquire information about youths’ goals and expectations for their future participation in cultural and other activities. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix E. While questions about youths’ aspirations were asked in multiple life domains, emphasis was intentionally placed on youths’ future engagement with cultural activities, with nearly half of the total questions (26 of 60) focused on such questions as, for example, desire to participate as an adult in subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering. To ascertain information about potentially competing goals (e.g., wanting to work in a year-round job and run a trapline), youths were also asked about their interest and expectation to participate in activities that are not particularly associated with Dena’ina culture (e.g., joining the
military, living outside of Alaska, going to college). Youths were asked to answer each aspiration question twice: once to indicate how much they want to engage in the activity as an adult and once to indicate how much they think they actually will engage in the activity as an adult. This strategy was used to identify potential discrepancies between youths’ visions of their “desired futures” and their “expected futures.”

**Participant-Observation**

Participant observation was conducted in a wide variety of settings throughout the seasonal round, with every effort taken to observe and participate in traditional cultural activities as well as in the other domains of youths’ lives. I attended and participated in community events, including memorial and celebratory potlatches, Russian Christmas, Winter Carnival, spring clean-up, and family wellness gatherings. I substitute taught at the village school, cheered the high school basketball team, attended the school’s annual Culture Week. I traveled with an elder by four-wheeler to a neighboring village to watch Nondalton teens compete in the regional Native Youth Olympics. I fished, sledded, hiked, and took walks with youth and welcomed them into my village home most days to visit, play board games, do crafts, surf the internet, and share countless cups of cocoa or soup. I visited with ice fishers in winter and spent time with families at fish camp in the summer putting up salmon through every stage of the process, from seining and splitting to making salt fish and dry strips. I rode on snow machines with youths to check traps they maintained near the village, and I picked berries and made fireweed jelly with their mothers and grandmothers. I spent time with youths and their families in homes and on the land when I was invited. These visits included an annual family hike to go “hunting” for wild celery, ordinary evenings at home eating moose stew, steam baths, and visiting with elders over tea about their experiences growing up.

In particular, I made efforts to observe youths engaged in cultural activities, especially subsistence activities. Since these activities, with the exception of fish camp in July, were usually unpredictable and sometimes occurred when I was not present in the village, I also made every effort to be present to observe and participate when invited in a broad range of cultural activities with youths, their families, and other community members. This included attending Culture Week at the school, an annual event in which youths learn traditional cultural activities, such as trapping, making nivigi, or introducing themselves in the Dena’ina language. I wrote detailed daily fieldnotes of my observations, activities, communications, and reflections in the field, totaling 187 single-spaced pages of text, which were then grouped by field visit and entered into Atlas.ti 6.2 to be coded and searched for information to contextualize and supplement interview and survey data.

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10 Nivigi is a traditional Dena’ina food made from blueberries or salmonberries mixed with fat and sugar. Sometimes whitefish is mixed in as well, and this is considered a delicacy by some people because of the taste and laborious process of preparing the fish for use in the dish. Nivigi is similar to the Yup’ik dish aqutuk, sometimes referred to as “Eskimo ice cream.”
4.4 Data Analysis

**Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data on digital audio recordings collected during administration of the EFI were transcribed and cleaned of names to protect the identity of participating youths and their family members. Every transcript was given a unique identification number (ID#) that linked it to other transcripts of interviews with the same participating youth (i.e., all interviews with youth “A” assigned ID#01, all interviews with youth “B” assigned ID#02, etc.). Transcripts with the same identification number were regrouped into a single document for every youth who took part in each of the six life domains (school, self, family, friends, community, culture). Second, open-ended interviews (n=15). All cleaned, transcribed, and regrouped interview data was then uploaded to Atlas.ti 6.2 with all data for each youth assigned as a ‘primary document’ in the HU. As shown in Figure 4.1, each primary document was coded in an iterative process that proceeded from a general to a specific level to identify both a priori and emergent themes (Ryan and Bernard 2003). First, each document was autocoded for blocks of text related to each specific domain. Text within each domain was then coded for the a priori themes in that domain (Appendix C) Data in each life domain were then coded again for emergent themes that were not anticipated from the literature review. Fourth, a separate coding operation was conducted for the primary topic of interest and key theme of ‘subsistence’. An autocode string was created for the key theme of subsistence that included: hunt, fish, trap, berries, skins, nivigi, moose, caribou, beaver, porcupine, hen, duck, bird, native, food, salmon, noodlevai, wood, and steam. As the fifth and final step in the coding process, an autocode string was created for the key theme of ‘aspirations’. Text passages related to aspirations were detected through the word string: future, goal, aspiration, and adult. Next, coded data were queried and

**Figure 4.1: Qualitative coding process**

- Autocode primary documents for six life domains of culture, community, self, school, friends, family
- Code within each life domain for a priori themes of subjective wellbeing
- Code within each life domain for emergent themes of subjective wellbeing
- Re-code all coded data for 'subsistence'
- Re-code all coded data for 'aspirations'
extracted from the database for analysis of thematic patterns by domain, a priori and emergent theme, and by key themes of subsistence and aspirations. Then data were analyzed for patterns and differences observed within domains and key themes by gender (male/female) and age category (older/younger).

**Quantitative data**

Quantitative data collected in the background and aspirations questionnaires were entered into Excel and analyzed for frequency distributions within and across participants. Data collected in the wellbeing survey (MSLSS) was analyzed using SAS 9.2 for central tendencies and standard deviations. These procedures are discussed in more detail in the chapter that follows.

**4.5 Ethical Considerations**

**Research with Alaska Native communities**

Every introductory anthropology course includes a lesson on fieldwork that invariably includes the concept of building *rapport* (Agar 1996) with individuals and communities we study and includes discussion of the role of *reciprocity* in the anthropologist’s professional relationships with so-called informants (Schultz and Lavenda 1995). Reciprocity can be viewed through a dual lens, as a strategic instrument for accessing and acquiring data and as an ethical obligation of the researcher to ‘give back’ something of meaningful and equitable value to the individuals and communities in exchange for the information taken/shared that will be analyzed, interpreted, and disseminated for the researcher’s personal and/or professional gain. The latter approach is the one taken in this dissertation research and has been described as a key principle of “indigenous methodologies” (Smith 1999). Indigenous methodologies are those that

approach cultural protocols and behaviours (sic) as an integral part of methodology....‘factors’ to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood (Smith 1999:15).

In lieu of the history of colonial and otherwise imposed research in indigenous communities, it would be both ethically improper and practically impossible to conduct research in an Alaska Native community in this era in which the three principles of reflexivity (of the researcher), participation (of the community), and reciprocity (between the two) were not integral. In keeping with these principles, I first spoke with two members of the Nondalton Tribal Council, whom I had previously met, about the research, and they indicated support for the research and advised me to submit a letter to the entire council for consideration, which I did (Appendix F). I then participated by phone in a council meeting in which members reviewed the letter and granted verbal permission to conduct the research, followed by a written letter of permission (Appendix G). This permission was granted on the basis of my promise to share the final report and any publications resulting from the study with the Nondalton Tribal Council.
to review before submitting for publication and to return a copy of the dissertation and any subsequent publications that result from the study to the community.

**Research with children**

Research with children has some important ethical differences from research with adults. Special protections for children are required by most IRBs under 45 CFR 46 Subpart D\(^\text{11}\), regardless of whether the research involves clinical intervention or whether it is funded or conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, for which the federal regulation was codified. As per this regulation and the Case IRB requirements, youths under the age of 18 years were required to provide written assent and to have written parental permission to participate in this research. The active consent (assent) of children to participate in the research is a critical aspect of the methodological approach described earlier in this chapter in which children are viewed and treated as primary sources of information about their own lives. In social research with children, parents may expect to be informed by the researcher about what children share, which may create methodological and ethical concerns regarding confidentiality and trust between the researcher and the child. Children may be reluctant to share information with researchers if they fear retribution from parents or other adults with authority and power, for example teachers or community leaders. To address these issues, several precautions were taken. First, the youth assent and parental permission forms clearly stated that information shared with me by children would not be returned or reported to parents or any other community members (including other children) until it had been aggregated and identifying information had been removed to maintain participant anonymity. Second, youths were allowed to withdraw from the research at any time for any reason. Parents could also withdraw their permission for youths to participate in the study. One youth withdrew entirely from the study and one was withdrawn by a parent for unknown reasons. Some youths chose to participate in closed-ended surveys, but declined to participate in open-ended interviews. In this manner, youths had control over not just whether they participated in the research but how they participated, described further below.

Morrow and Richards (1996) contend that the disparity in power and status between children and adults presents the greatest ethical issue for researchers doing research with children, particularly research using methodologies that do not treat children as passive sources of data. They suggest that redressing these power imbalances can partly be accomplished through participatory methodologies in which children are treated and regarded as active social actors and agents in the research process. This dissertation research took the latter approach, first, by recognizing youths’ views of their lives worthy of study in their own right and, second, by giving youths the power of choice in how they participated in the interviews and other instruments. Youths were allowed to complete some instruments and not others, as they chose. In each interview participating youths chose from a range of topics (i.e., life domains) what they wished to discuss that day, thereby reducing the likelihood they would feel coerced

or pressured to engage in topics of discussion that (1) they did not want to or (2) that they also might not feel comfortable *declining* to talk about or that had the potential to negatively impact their wellbeing. Furthermore, to allow youths to choose topics that were not already covered in the semi-structured protocol, they were also asked in every interview if there was “anything else” they wanted to discuss to create an opportunity for open conversation about other dimensions of their lives and wellbeing about which they wished to share. One caveat to this open-ended participatory approach is that I did inform youths prior to data collection that if I became aware during the research that they were in danger, I would be obliged to inform “the appropriate authorities,” which may have reduced their willingness to share information that would have consequences they wished to avoid. Therein lays perhaps the most significant ethical and methodological “catch-22” of doing research with youth. That is finding the ethical and methodological grounds between “enough-protection” and “over-protection” for a group of individuals which often is not allowed to speak for, and therefore represent, itself and has often been silenced in social research and the policies and programs it helps shape. Often this under-representation and misrepresentation of children and youth is ironically done in the name of “protecting their best interests.” I found no wholly satisfying solution and addressed the dilemma with the measures described herein, culled from the work of other child researchers (e.g., Hood, et al. 1996; Morrow and Richards 1996; Thomas and O’Kane 1998).

**Incentives and approvals**

Youths participating in the research were each compensated $5 for completion of each survey or questionnaire and $20 for the completion of the open-ended interviews ($30 total). The open-ended interviews were compensated at a higher rate than surveys because they took substantially more time to complete.

The Nondalton Tribal Council reviewed and approved the research plan (Appendix G). The research protocol was approved by the Case IRB and maintained throughout the data collection and writing period. Up-to-date CITI certification was also maintained throughout the data collection and writing period.
CHAPTER 5: DENA’INA YOUTHS’ SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING IN FIVE LIFE DOMAINS

In many Native villages the rates of health and social problems, particularly those engendered by alcohol abuse, are abnormally high, and many are accelerating. The segments of the Native population least capable of protecting themselves, notably children and young adults, are most at risk. The data are stark. Absent timely and dramatic action, they indicate that the prognosis for positive change is poor. Time is running out (Alaska Federation of Natives 1989:1).

Wellbeing is the engaged participation of a child or parent in the everyday routines and activities deemed desirable by a cultural community, and the psychological experiences produced as a result of such engagement (Weisner 2007:9).

5.1 Introduction
An emergence of interest in positive youth development in the past two decades has spurred growing attention to diverse contexts of youth wellbeing across the social, behavioral, and medical sciences. Until recently, efforts to assess the social and psychological wellbeing of children and adolescents typically focused on so-called objective indicators of health (e.g., parental divorce rates) or took subjective reports from adults as proxies for youths’ wellbeing. With the rise of research that regards children as independent social actors worthy of study in their own right—and in their own voices, and with the recognition that parents’ interests and wellbeing often differ significantly and meaningfully from those of their children—have come indices of subjective youth wellbeing that ask children and adolescents directly how they perceive and experience their own lives.

This chapter reports the results of the Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Survey completed by the Dena’ina youths participating in this study. Quantifiable measures such as the MSLSS are useful to compartmentalize and understand the multidimensional construct of wellbeing. Qualitative assessments are also essential for understanding the experiences represented by these numerical indices—that is, how youths understand their own wellbeing and give meaning to it and the contexts in which it occurs. To explore how the youths participating in this study perceive and experience their lives and wellbeing, semi-structured interviews were conducted in each of the five domains (family, friends, school, self, community), as well as an additional domain (culture) discussed in the next chapter. The wellbeing survey and interviews were used to achieve, in part, the second objective of this study—to examine the subjective wellbeing of Alaska Native youth across life domains. After a summary of the sample characteristics in the following section the MSLSS survey findings are presented, followed by data from the qualitative interviews.
5.2 Sample Characteristics

**Participating Youths**

The case study design ensured that the sample was relatively homogenous, in that all 19 participating youths were of Alaska Native descent, between the ages of 10 and 19, and lived at the time of data collection in the same rural village of Nondalton, Alaska. Despite these shared characteristics, however, there are differences among study participants worth noting. Table 5.1 shows the age and gender characteristics of all the youths participating in the study. Participating youths were on average 15 years old (range 10 to 19), and nearly two-thirds (n=11) were in the top half of the age range.

### Table 5.1: Participating youths’ age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-14 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>(63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the youths reported being of Dena’ina Athabascan descent, with approximately one-third of the sample also reporting other Alaska Native and/or European ancestry. In addition to age, gender, and ancestry, youths differed in terms of other individual characteristics. As shown in Table 5.2, approximately half of the youths taking part in the study reported being religious or spiritual, while about one-fourth of the youths said they are not spiritual or religious or “do not know.” However, when asked with what, if any, established religious or spiritual traditions they personally identify themselves, all but two of the 15 youths who responded to this question identified with either Russian Orthodox Christianity, Native traditions, or a combination of both. Thus, there appears to be more spiritual and/or religious identification and affiliation among the youths than the self-reported indicator would suggest.

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12 Four youths (21%) chose not to complete the background questionnaire, resulting in missing demographic data for this portion of the sample. All four of these youths completed the life satisfaction scale and three of these youths completed some or all of the domain-specific qualitative interviews. Because participating youths had the option to choose to complete (or not) any instrument without question or challenge, I cannot explain the decisions made by youths to complete some instruments and not others. I speculate that some youths may have been more reticent to share information about some life domains than others, particularly if they perceived that information might reflect on themselves and/or family members in ways that may not be personally or socially acceptable. Therefore, the data may err in the direction of depicting youths’ wellbeing more positively than it actually is, though there is no way to determine that from the data.
### Table 5.2: Participating youths’ religious/spiritual affiliation(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you religious/spiritual?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Do not know”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing (not reported)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian Orthodox</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska Native</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Orthodox and Native</td>
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<td>(5 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Do not know”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing (not reported)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Residential, Educational, and Employment History**

All youths in the study sample come from families going back many generations from Nondalton and in the Lake Clark/Lake Iliamna area more broadly. In addition to their universal history of living in the village, 11 (57%) of the youths in the sample had previously lived for periods ranging from several months to several years in Anchorage or elsewhere on the “road system” in Alaska. Two (11%) of the 19 participants had lived for a year or less in other Alaska Native villages off the road system, and three (16%) had lived outside of Alaska for less than a year each. Through the preliminary census and conversations with community members, I determined that approximately 6 to 8 Nondalton youths between ages 10 and 19 were living outside the village in other Alaska communities or attending boarding school in the lower 48 during the study year.

Educational status varied as well for the 19 study participants, as shown in Table 5.3. Six (31.5%) of the youths were enrolled in grades 4 through 8, while eight (42%) were in grades 9 through 12. Four (21%) were either “Super Seniors” or enrolled in a GED course outside of school, and one (5%) had already acquired a GED. Several youths had attended schools outside of Nondalton previously. Two (11%) of the youths had been enrolled at schools in other villages “off the road system”, and two had been in school in Anchorage or elsewhere on the road system. Finally, three youths (16%) had spent some time, generally about a year, “outside” (away from Alaska) attending BIA boarding schools in the lower 48 states. Of the local youths who were not eligible to participate in the study because they were not in the village, three of them were attending boarding school in the Lower 48. Despite these diverse educational experiences, the youths had, up until the study period, spent 83 to 100 percent of their school years enrolled at the Nondalton School.

The Lake and Peninsula School District operates on the Chugach model “standards-based” curriculum. Students are expected to complete specified “levels” and “standards” in various topics to advance to graduation. The standards are informally linked to traditional elementary and secondary grades 1-12. Students who reach their “senior” year and have not completed the standards required to graduate may choose to (1) drop out of school; (2) complete a GED outside of school; or (3) remain enrolled in school until age 21, when they must either graduate or be dropped from enrollment by
the district. Those students choosing the third option are informally referred to as “Super Seniors” by teachers, parents, and students. Beginning in the year in which this study was conducted, Super Seniors were provided a room in the school, apart from the other students, to conduct their studies. Each Super Senior “contracted” with the principal to be in the building on specified days and hours of the school year. Unless they specifically requested otherwise, Super Seniors received no formal instruction and their studies were “self-guided.” During the year I was in Nondalton, no students, including Super Seniors, graduated.

Of the local youths who were not eligible to participate in the study because they were not in the village, three of them were attending boarding school in the lower 48. Several youths knew of family members who had attended BIA boarding schools. Five youths (27%) reported knowing of at least one family member (i.e., father, mother, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather) who had attended college, and two (11%) youths reported knowing of at least one family member who had graduated from college. Several youths reported that they did not know if anyone in their families had attended or graduated from college.

Nine (47%) of the participating youths had held a total of 12 jobs (mean=1.3, range=1-2), all of which were part-time (less than 20 hours/week). Jobs ranged from doing paid childcare (n=2) to working for a tribal organization (n=4), seasonal wild land firefighting (n=1), to working for organizations and businesses such as the National Park Service, a mining company, the school district, and/or in construction (n=5). All of these jobs were seasonal and held primarily in the summer months.

**Household and Family Characteristics**

All study participants lived, during the data collection period, with family members. Of the 19 participating youths, 9 (47%) lived with two parents or a parent and the parent’s partner. Of the remaining 10 youths, 7 (37%) lived with a single parent and 3 (16%) lived with grandparents only. Table 5.3 shows where parents of youths resided at the time of data collection.

Youths had an average of 4 living siblings each (range of 2 to 12). On average, youths had 2 siblings who lived in the same household (range of 0 to 4), and 2.4 siblings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers N (%)</th>
<th>Fathers N (%)</th>
<th>All Parents N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In village</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same household</td>
<td>15 (79)</td>
<td>12 (63)</td>
<td>27 (71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other household</td>
<td>13 (68)</td>
<td>9 (47)</td>
<td>22 (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of village</td>
<td>2 (11)</td>
<td>3 (16)</td>
<td>5 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Alaska</td>
<td>4 (21)</td>
<td>5 (26)</td>
<td>9 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Alaska</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>1 (5)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceased</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>2 (11)</td>
<td>2 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Parents</td>
<td>19 (100)</td>
<td>19 (100)</td>
<td>38 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
who lived in other households, either in or out of the village (range of 0 to 9). Fourteen (74%) youths in the sample lived with siblings, while 5 (26%) of the youths did not live with siblings. Seven (37%) of youths in the study, from a total of three different families, had at least one deceased sibling.

Youths’ households spanned between two and four generations of family. Five (26%), of the youths lived in households with grandparents. Fourteen (74%) of the youths lived in two-generation (youth to parent) households, while four (21%) youths lived in three-generation households (youth to grandparent), and one (5%) lived in a four-generation household (youth to great-grandparent).

5.3 Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale

In 1964, the World Health Organization defined health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Despite this holistic vision of health, however, dominant models of wellbeing continued for decades to identify “health” as the absence of pathology, illness, and disease (World Health Organization 1964). Eventually, researchers began to study positive dimensions of health, such as life satisfaction, in adults. In the 1990s, these studies extended to child studies with research on positive youth development and subjective wellbeing of children and adolescents, as discussed in Chapter 3.

The MSLSS, developed by Huebner and colleagues (Huebner 1994; Huebner 1998a), measures children’s life satisfaction in five domains, yielding six scores per individual, including one global life satisfaction score and five domain-specific scores. Prior to development of the Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS), instruments used to assess children’s life satisfaction were limited to global measures that produced a single score of wellbeing, or “overall” life satisfaction (Huebner 2001). The domain specificity of the MSLSS is useful for comparisons to “traditional objective indicators used to assess quality of life of children and adolescents (e.g., divorce rates, family income levels, per pupil expenditures on schooling)” (Huebner 2001:2). In this study, the MSLSS was used to quantitatively examine relative wellbeing among youths in the sample overall and in each life domain. Next, qualitative interviews in each domain provided data with which to understand and interpret the quantitative findings and further understand factors of subjective wellbeing in the participant sample.

Forty items across the five domains were rated by each youth on a scale of 1 to 6. Means and standard deviations were calculated across participants for each sub-scale (domain) and for the scale overall. Following the procedures used by Huebner and colleagues (1998a), item responses were summed and divided by the number of items in each domain to achieve mean scores. Negatively keyed items were reverse-scored such that higher scores represent higher satisfaction. The means and standard deviations for each domain are as follows: Family (M=4.9; SD=0.7), Friends (M=4.6; SD=0.9), School (M=4.3; SD=0.9), Community (M=4.3; SD=1.1), Self (M=4.6; SD=0.8). Mean scores for each domain and the total correspond to somewhere on the life satisfaction scale between “mildly agree” and “moderately agree.” Means for the

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13 See, for example, the Perceived Life Satisfaction Scale (Adelman 1989) or the Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner 1991).
Family, Friends, and Self satisfaction sub-scales fall above the mid-point (4.5) between “mildly agree” and “moderately agree” while means for School and Community sub-scales fall slightly below the mid-point between these two levels of satisfaction.

These results show relatively positive ratings, on average, within and across the five life domains among the Nondalton youths participating in this study. The range of scores in each domain, however, indicates variability in satisfaction with every life domain, with the greatest difference between the top and bottom scores emerging in the Friends, School, and Community domains. Scores at the bottom of the range in Friends (2.6), School (2.4), and Community (2.3) domains indicate mild to moderate dissatisfaction with these life domains among some youths in the sample.

**Reliability of the Scale**

Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha$) is a coefficient of internal consistency or reliability, commonly used in the social sciences. It is a squared correlation between observed scores and true scores, in which reliability is measured in terms of the ratio of true score variance to observed score variance. The statistic provides an indirect indicator of the internal consistency of a scale, or the degree to which items in a scale or sub-scale measure the same “thing” (e.g., life satisfaction) among a group of individuals. Alpha coefficients for the participating Nondalton youths’ MSLSS scores were calculated and are reported in Table 5.4, along with mean scores for youths’ life satisfaction overall and in specific life domains. The alpha coefficient for the overall measure of life satisfaction was .87, suggesting high internal consistency of the scale overall, with 1.0 meaning total agreement, or internal reliability. The individual life domain alphas are not as high as those reported by Huebner et al (1998a), but indicate internal scale consistency by statistical research standards (George 2003). The alpha score of .62 in the Family domain, however, does not meet the generally accepted minimum of .70 for reliability.

**Table 5.4: Average life satisfaction overall and by life domain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>M (range)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family domain</td>
<td>4.9 (3.6-5.7)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends domain</td>
<td>4.6 (2.6-6.0)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School domain</td>
<td>4.3 (2.4-5.6)</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community domain</td>
<td>4.3 (2.3-5.7)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self domain</td>
<td>4.6 (3.1-6.0)</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (all domains)</td>
<td>4.5 (3.2-5.7)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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14 Huebner and colleagues reported the following alpha coefficients for their study of life satisfaction in 291 students from grades 6 through 8 in an urban area of the southern US: Family (.84), Friends (.85), School (.85), Community (Living Environment) (.78), Self (.77), Total (.91).

15 Huebner and colleagues (1998) refer to this domain as “Living Environment.” For this study, the domain was called “Community” to make it relevant to the context of the research, as youths in Nondalton sometimes move between family homes (e.g., parent to grandparent) and the community (i.e. village) is clearly the geographically and meaningfully distinct “living environment” that is recognized by residents, including youths. Items in this domain were not altered except where “living environment” was changed to “community.”
of the sub-scale. This may be explained by the fact that in Nondalton as in many small Alaska Native villages, according to the youths’ narratives, nearly everyone is related in some fashion to one another. Therefore, questionnaire item #8, in which youths are asked to rate their agreement with the statement “My family is better than most”, may not be a meaningful question for youths in context of a small village. In fact, when the item is removed from the calculation, the coefficient for the Family domain goes up to 0.72, indicating support for this explanation and for the consistency of the scale when that question is removed.

5.4. Semi-Structured Interviews on Youths’ Subjective Wellbeing

As described in Chapter 4, the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets Framework (Benson, 2002; Lerner, 2003; Taylor, 2002) is a theoretical framework for positive youth development based on 40 factors, or developmental assets, that have been shown empirically to correlate positively with wellbeing in large and diverse samples of children and adolescents. The developmental assets served as the basis for developing an interview protocol to query youths about their subjective wellbeing in multiple life domains. Each developmental asset was assigned to one of five life domains that corresponded with the life satisfaction survey (MSLSS), including: Family, Friends, School, Community, Self, and the additional, sixth domain of Culture. An interview protocol was developed to query youths on the developmental assets in each of the six domains, as well as other, locally-relevant factors of wellbeing indicated by unstructured interviews with parents, elders and other community members in the early stages of the fieldwork. Each asset was assigned to the life domain that seemed most relevant (e.g., the asset of family boundaries was assigned to the Family domain). When a clear and indisputable association between an asset and a specific domain was not evident, knowledge of the ethnographic context was used to assign the asset to a domain. This categorization of developmental assets by life domain was used as an analytic tool, to draw a methodological “crosswalk” that would integrate the two key theoretical constructs of youth wellbeing used in the study: life satisfaction (as defined by the MSLSS) and positive development (as defined by the Developmental Assets Framework).

As reported in Chapter 4, youths self-selected to complete interviews in each of six life domains. This self-selection procedure resulted in a variable number of completed interviews, and thus a variable amount of data collected, across the domains. Further, as the data reported below show, a greater proportion of males selected to complete interviews in most domains than females, possibly producing a gender bias in the study findings, or perhaps indicating an greater identification with subsistence activities among males (see Chapter 4, Table 4.3, for a complete list of data collected by instrument type and participant gender). Open-ended interviews surveyed youths’ experiences in each of the five life domains in the life satisfaction questionnaire, as well as a sixth domain of culture. This sixth domain was created to explore youths’ identification with Dena’ina Athabascan values, subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering, and other “traditional” cultural activities, as well as their views about how these cultural factors figure into their present wellbeing and aspirations for the future. Findings for these cultural factors and their association with youths’ subjective wellbeing and future aspirations are reported in the Chapter 6. In the remaining sections
of this chapter, qualitative interview data are reported for the domains of Family, Friends, School, Community, and Self. The sections are organized by domain, and each section begins with a description and definition of each theme explored in the corresponding domain. Next, the findings for the domain are presented, including those regarding the a priori themes, or developmental assets, as well as themes that emerged from the data. Exemplar quotes from study participants are also provided.

Wellbeing and Family

Fifteen youths (79% of all participants) answered questions about family, including 10 males and 5 females, as shown in Table 5.5. Questions in this domain explored five a priori themes, or developmental assets, of wellbeing related to family, including: family support; positive family communication; other adult relationships; family boundaries; and time at home (Alaska ICE 2004). One key theme of the subjective wellbeing of these youths also emerged from the interviews: family resilience. Definitions for each of these themes are presented in Table 5.6. When asked what is most important in their life, youths almost uniformly mentioned family, such as one older youth who succinctly replied, “My family, the things I do, the land I live off and everything.” This corresponds with the relatively high satisfaction in the family domain of the MSLSS on average (see Table 5.4). On the MSLSS, family scores were on average the highest of any domain. Families were most often described by youths to include parents, siblings, and grandparents—some of whom lived with the youths, as mentioned earlier. Aunts, uncles, and cousins are also important members of the youths’ large extended families, and they frequently spend time with cousins walking and playing in the village and nearby countryside or “nighting out.” Cousins and friends, in the village, are often one and the same, signifying the interdependency of life domains. This interplay is also salient between family and culture domains, discussed in the next chapter. The interview data showed interplay between themes within domains, as well. Family support and positive family communication were key themes in the interviews, and these two themes frequently intersected in youths’ narratives about their families. Family relationships provide youths with a potential source of material, social, and emotional support. Material support comes to youths in many forms, including: subsistence-harvested meat and fish shared by extended family members, sometimes shipped hundreds of miles between households; equipment needed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age 10-14</th>
<th>Age 15-19</th>
<th>All youths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 (13)</td>
<td>8 (53)</td>
<td>10 (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 (13)</td>
<td>3 (20)</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All youths</td>
<td>4 (27)</td>
<td>11 (73)</td>
<td>15 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 “Nighting out” means sleeping over at a friend’s house.
### Table 5.6: Family domain themes and definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A priori themes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>Family life provides high levels of love and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive family</td>
<td>Parents and youth communicate positively; youth is willing to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>seek advice and counsel from parents and extended family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other adult</td>
<td>Youth receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family boundaries</td>
<td>Family has clear rules, roles and consequences and monitors youth’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>whereabouts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time at home</td>
<td>Youth chooses to spend quality time at home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family resilience</td>
<td>Family has overcome adverse experiences (e.g., death of a child, addiction)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

to travel, recreate, and subsist on the land; and safe places to stay when problems occur at home. Families are also sources of social and emotional support. Parents and older siblings, in particular, were credited with providing advice and guidance. An older youth who acknowledged that he was struggling with personal problems commented that his “parents...provided me with a whole bunch of useful information...about being a good person, getting a good job, trying to live on my own, and all of that.” Another older youth, when asked who he would turn to for help, if needed, replied, “My mom. Basically, my mom will figure out one way or another to get me [to talk about a problem].” Parental support also figured into youths’ aspirations for the future, as when one older youth was asked how he will spend his time once he achieves his goal of building his own house:

> Probably getting more guidance from my dad....Like if I want to make a steam bath...and everything like that. Because life is a continuous thing....you can never stop and take a rest. That’s what my dad did, and that’s hopefully what I might do. —Albert (older male)

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18 Village definition adapted by Alaska ICE (2004) from the original Search Institute definition: “Family has clear rules, and consequences and monitors youth’s whereabouts.”
19 Original Search Institute definition: “Youth is out with friends ‘with nothing special to do’ two or fewer nights per week.”
20 To keep youths identities confidential and maintain their anonymity, I selected to identify the age of youths quoted in the dissertation by pseudonym, gender, and age category (‘older’ and ‘younger’). Youths identified as ‘older’ were in the 15 to 19 year age range, while ‘younger’ youths were in the 10 to 14 year age range at the time data was gathered for this study. While this diminishes slightly the information available to the reader, this decision reflects the small sample size and the ease with which youths could potentially be identified if specific ages were provided. By using categorical age, the reader has at least some information with regard to age with which to evaluate the data and findings, while maintaining participant confidentiality.
Siblings and extended family members are also important sources of family support for youths and figured prominently into youths’ other adult relationships. When asked who they could turn to for help, several youths said they would go to their godparents, most of whom are also aunts and uncles. Asked who she would talk with about something that made her sad, one younger youth said “...me and my uncles and aunts.” Older siblings similarly fill this role. When asked what comes to mind when thinking about family, an older youth replied:

*People where you can turn to and count on them, so like when you’re lost or down...you could go to like one of your sisters or brothers and talk to them about your problem and they probably might help you.* –Ryan (older male)

Youths frequently talked about younger siblings as people to take care of, play with, and look out for, whereas older siblings are people to count on, spend time with, and go to for advice or support.

Grandparents also figured prominently in youths’ narratives about family. Most youths cited grandparents as role models and important family supports. For most youths, grandparents are important and valued teachers of family history, as well as cultural history, tradition, and language. For example, youths recalled stories told to them by grandparents of historic and legendary battles between the Dena’ina people and the Yup’ik or Aleut peoples to the south. Grandparents were also instrumental in teaching youths about Alaska Native history, including lessons on the personal and cultural impact of policies of assimilation, such as being forcibly prohibited from speaking the Dena’ina language in boarding school. Growing up in or near the village long before the 1976 “Molly Hootch decision” that mandated construction of high schools in more than 125 Alaska villages, many of the youths’ grandparents attended government-run boarding schools for Native American students in places, for example, as far away from home as Southeast Alaska, Oregon, or California. Occasionally, youths from the village still attend some of these secondary schools, but today they do so by choice.

Communication with grandparents was not as uniformly supportive as youths would have liked, however. Youths indicated feeling that grandparents and the enormous capital of cultural knowledge they possess were not always accessible to be shared with younger generations, as evidenced by a conversation between several youths:

Albert (older male):  *I think there’s a generation gap because nowadays we don’t see any of the elders with the younger generation. So the younger generation usually hang around with the younger generation, [and] the elders kind of keep to themselves...*

Theo (older male):  *Well, it would have been different if our parents were...*

Albert:  *...were more involved.*
Theo: I think that some of the traditions that couldn’t get passed on to use are because of what happened to our parents when they were going to school...


Theo: ...and how they couldn’t learn their language...back in the day.

Thus, these youths viewed the impact of cultural assimilation policies on their grandparents as having negatively impacted their relationships with the younger generations. Grandparents did not teach the parents the language and other cultural traditions. Parents, in turn, could not teach the youths. Combined, these events resulted in an intergenerational discontinuity in communication or what one older youth described as a “generation gap.” Despite their observations of this “gap” in communication, however, several youths commented that they hoped to ask their elders in the future to help them learn cultural knowledge and traditions.

Youths generally wanted to spend time at home with their families, when they were not doing activities with friends or in school. Some youths, especially older boys, said they occasionally like to spend time alone walking or exercising. Quality time with families, however, was not restricted to time at home. Every youth reported enjoying time with families on the land doing a variety of activities. Many families have fish camps where they spend several weeks or months in the summer, and it is common for families to take day or overnight trips on the land to visit relatives in nearby villages, hunt, or just go “riding” for pleasure.

A key theme that emerged from the data was family resilience. Every youth talked about having experienced adversity in his or her family in the past and/or present, and some talked about how their families dealt with these experiences in ways that both positive and negatively affected their personal wellbeing, as well as their ability and aspirations to spend time with family members. Adversity experienced by youths in their families included: death, illness, addiction, abuse, and separation. How families responded to particular hardships appears in youths’ narratives to be related to their perceptions of the impact of these adverse experiences on their wellbeing.

All of the youths had experienced the deaths of loved ones, and several had lost at least one sibling. A younger youth described family members as supporting one another after the death of a family member:

Like if someone was at our house...to help us...they would stay the night with us until we were happy again. [We would]...keep each other distracted....like...ask our parents to watch...what we’re doing or building something. We would ask if they want to watch movies together or if they want to watch a real funny movie. Talk about funny stories. –Ben (younger male)

In Ben’s narrative, family members shared in each other’s suffering and provided support to each other during a particularly painful experience until they “were happy
again,” suggesting that adversity or trauma is something that can be overcome and from which families and move forward in positive and life-affirming ways. While it did not arise frequently in the interview, some youths mentioned having witnessed or experienced verbal and physical violence in their families. These experiences ranged from yelling and verbal abuse to being “pushed around.” They most often attributed these behaviors to family members’ misuse of alcohol.

Alcohol abuse and dependence is a significant personal and public health problem in Alaska that is highly associated with other prevalent and preventable health problems, such as family violence, suicide, and serious unintentional injury. One indicator of these problems, the 2005-2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) found, for example, that Alaska had one of the highest rates of alcohol dependence in the previous year for people 12 and older, 12 to 17, and 26+ years (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2009). The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Division of Behavioral Health reports that Alaska consistently has one of the highest rates of alcohol dependence and abuse, with rates twice as high as the national average, and ranks as one of the top five states in per capita alcohol sales and the highest in terms of alcohol dependence (Services 2001).

While Alaska Native people once had higher rates of binge drinking than non-Native people in the state, this appears to have equalized by 2007 with both groups reporting binge drinking (defined as having 5 or more drinks on at least one occasion in the past 30 days) at equal rates of about 18% statewide and, for Alaska Native people, in the Bristol Bay region; binge drinking among Alaska Native people has significantly declined since the early 1990s, when it was higher than 30% for Alaska Native people, but remained above the national average of 16% for all groups in the U.S. (Alaska Native Epidemiology Center 2009). While decreasing, the rate of alcohol dependence in rural Alaska Native communities remains quite high in many areas, although data is difficult to obtain due to the sensitive nature of the topic. In response to these concerning figures, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) developed the Substance Abuse Prevention Initiative to develop a tribally focused, statewide plan for substance abuse prevention among rural youth, as it has been well-documented that most substance abuse and dependence has an early onset and that youths of parents who are dependent on alcohol are four times more likely than their peers to become dependent themselves.

As described by the Dena’ina youths participating in this study, the effects of alcohol abuse and dependence on families are quite broad and variable. Youths talked about family members “staying in” and being less active or engaged with the family when alcohol abuse or dependence is present.

*When my [parents] separated, we didn’t go travel. We used to go traveling everywhere, but now not anymore...basically we stay in the house. [That change in the family happened] a good while ago from alcohol.* –Ryan (older male)
Youths consistently indicated that addiction to alcohol, in particular, is a barrier to positive family communication and compromised their ability to spend quality time at home. Some youths described going to the homes of relatives or friends to stay overnight when their parents were drinking. Some youths described this experience as occurring only in the past, while others said they continue to move between family homes from one night or week to another to maintain a safe distance from family members who were binge drinking. One youth asked about what comes to mind when she thinks of family, said:

What I think about [is] mainly happiness and how I enjoy being with them when they’re not drunk and...how it just doesn’t work out when they are drunk. I think [that is] the reason why I try staying outside more, spend more time with friends than family.—Casey (younger female)

Alcohol was specifically credited by this youth as the reason he would not choose to spend much time with family in the future.

I would like to stay away from [my parents] for a little while [after high school] and come back and see the family here and there. When they’re drunk, I think that’s the only time [we don’t get along]....as much as [I love] my parents, I don’t want to spend much time with them if they’re drunk. Kinda pointless. —Theo (older male)

Thus, relationships with family members can both contribute to wellbeing, as well compromise it. Youths varied with regard to how negatively they perceived alcohol and addiction to affect their wellbeing. This variability of experience appeared to depend, at least partly, on whether family members became verbally or physically abusive when drinking. Some youths said that intoxicated family members could be “funny”, while others suggested addicted family members were prone to violence or depression. Some youths, in fact, interpreted their experiences with alcohol and addiction in the family as providing them with valuable learning experiences:

...drinking is one of [the ways I don’t want to be like family]....I seen my family members around it and I see what it does to them, and I...don’t want to end up like them....the past is the past. It already happened; it’s over; look ahead. ...I think I’m very lucky because I have a whole family...with wisdom... because I don’t have to learn it the hard way like they did. I can watch, stand by and watch them and what affected them and I can kind of follow their footsteps, but if I don’t like it I can find my own way. —Albert (older male)

While overall there was a high prevalence among youths of present or past experience with alcohol and addiction in the family, most youths reported having essentially positive relationships with their parents, despite these challenges. Overall, youths
wanted to spend more time with their parents at home and on the land when alcohol was not a factor. Thus, the resilience within a family in dealing with adversity of any kind appears to directly impact the wellbeing of youths and their aspirations, at least with regard to their family relationships and time at home.

**Wellbeing and Friends**

Fifteen youths (79% of participants) completed interviews in the Friends domain, as shown in Table 5.7. Questions in this domain explored five a priori themes, or developmental assets, four of which are reported on below. These include: *positive peer influence; restraint; resistance; and peaceful conflict resolution* (Alaska ICE 2004). Two themes also emerged from the Friend domain interviews: *moral support* and *positive social connections*. Definitions for each of these themes are shown in Table 5.8. As reported above in Table 5.4, youths’ average MSLSS scores in the Friends domain were relatively high, indicating mild to moderate satisfaction in this life domain as a group. However, individual scores in the Friends domain ranged from 2.6 to 6.0, or from moderate dissatisfaction to strong satisfaction, suggesting substantial individual variability. This variability was also reflected in the qualitative data. Youths’ experience of friends substantially intersects with that of community. For all of the youths, friends and community are heavily associated. As one older youth put it, “*Mostly we’re friends with everyone. Small village.*” A younger youth, when asked what comes to mind when he thinks about friends, said, “*I just think about the people back home, if I’m somewhere else.*” When asked how important friends are in their lives, most responses ranged from “important” to “very important.” Despite these ad hoc ratings, however, youths’ stories about friends did not invariably indicate that friends are a positive peer influence. Friends sometimes ask them to participate in behaviors, such as smoking cigarettes or marijuana, which some youths consider to be “bad” or unhealthy. Youths reported that it is not uncommon for older youths, in particular, to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes or marijuana, and several younger youths related examples of peers, sometimes younger than they, asking them to partake in these behaviors, too. Some youths, however, reported that their peers know they are “good” and do not ask them to take part in these activities. On the other hand, youths also related stories of going “up the mountain” with friends, and youths were frequently seen throughout the year doing pro-social activities with their peers, such as going to check on traps, going on hikes, and walking around the village together. Thus, youths’ experience of positive peer influences is quite variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.7: Friends domain interview participants by age and gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.8: Friends domain themes and definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A priori themes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive peer influence</td>
<td>Youth’s close friends model responsible behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restraint</td>
<td>Youth believes it’s important not to be sexually active or use alcohol or other drugs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>Youth can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous community influences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful conflict resolution</td>
<td>Youth seeks to resolve conflict without violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral support</td>
<td>Peers provide friendship and support to youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive social connections</td>
<td>Youth has opportunities to make friends and spend time with friends doing constructive activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, youths’ narratives regarding restraint, or abstinence from alcohol and drug use, were also somewhat variable. While some clearly avoid alcohol and drug use, others indicated that they have partaken in these activities and some relayed that they have attempted already to stop using cigarettes and other addictive substances. Youths’ resistance skills, as reflected in their narratives, were also variable, with some youths clearly stating that they had no interest in participating in these behaviors in the present or future. Youths generally said it was not difficult to say no to friends who encourage behavior they view as “bad,” but this is not a universal experience for all youths.

While there was little interview data with which to consider the theme of peaceful conflict resolution, youths often spoke of spending time alone when they are angry or upset, suggesting voluntary separation from the group and socially isolating oneself as a common strategy for handling conflict, as when one youth spoke of a friend:

*Sometimes we get in a fight. Like last time at school, [my friend] wanted me to play a game, but I don’t want [to] and [my friend] got upset and we started arguing. We just ignore each other for a little while, and after a while we become friends again.* —Casey (younger female)

Thus, conflicts generally seem to be resolved by a period of separation, followed by a reconciliation.

Friends provide youths with an important source of moral support. While most youths said they would talk only with family about problems, others see friends as an important source of emotional or moral support, such as one youth (Coby, older male) who said that friends are important “to calm you down....When I’m under pressure, when I talk, [my friend] will calm me down....We always change the subject and we always laugh...we hike up the mountain and we laugh.” Friends also provide physical and material support; life in “Bush Alaska” involves the daily use of boats, four-

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21 Definitions for a priori themes taken from Helping kids succeed—Alaskan style (Alaska Ice 2004). Definition for emergent themes developed from the ethnographic and interview data.
wheelers, and other equipment that require skill and strength to operate. When asked if they would turn to their friends for help in general, most youths immediately replied that they would ask a friend for help getting a machine unstuck or fixing a mechanical problem. Others told stories of going for long hikes with friends who hunted and cooked small game to feed the group when they got hungry or outings with friends who let them drive their snow machines or shared hunting equipment. Ethnographic observations were frequently made of youths going together to collect wood to fuel heating stoves. Some youths specifically indicated that a friend is someone who lends a helping hand when needed. Thus, peer support comes in the form of sharing of one’s resources, whether they are emotional, physical, or material.

Another form of peer support that all participating youths’ experienced comes in the form of camaraderie and companionship of friends. One youth (Amelia, younger female) echoed the comments of several others, saying, “When you’re bored and...an adult doesn’t want to play with you, then you call on your friends!” Youths spend a substantial amount of time with friends “hanging out”, which includes a broad array of activities. They cited many “favorite activities” they do with friends, most of which are physical and involve being outdoors. These included: bike riding, sledding, hiking, hunting, going to fish camp, swimming, going for Honda rides, taking walks, “nighting out”, playing basketball, going to Culture Camp, going to Bible Camp, going to school events in other villages (e.g., academic meets, sporting events, Native Youth Olympics, and prom), going to the playground, and playing video games. When asked about the observation that youths of mixed ages often spend time together, one older youth commented:

...there’s not a big population of us here, and we get a chance to know each other more instead of going out and meeting other people with different backgrounds, which would be nice....I think that’s an advantage for living back here. –Albert (older male)

While this youth’s comment highlights the advantage of living in a small community, it also points to a limited opportunity for positive social connections.

Opportunities for making new friends in a small, remote community are limited, and many youths discussed their wishes for more friends and positive social connections. Several youths commented that in recent years many youths had moved away from the village with their families or to attend school. One younger youth remarked on having three best friends, two of whom live in other villages and one in Anchorage. Younger youths wished for more friends as playmates, such as one who plainly stated she wants more friends “cause lots of kids is moving and I want somebody to play with.” Older youths, by contrast, want more opportunities for meeting potential.

22 In the village, “Honda” refers to any four-wheeler or all-terrain wheeled vehicle. Most people have one or more, and they are used for taking children to school, doing errands, or visiting friends, as well as for traveling up the mountain behind the village in the summer or across the lake in the winter when the ice is frozen.
romantic partners. An extensive network of family ties in the village means dating opportunities are scarce, and older youths lamented that they must go to other villages or Anchorage to find partners. A group of mixed-age youths, talking with each other, related their experience of living in community where, by their own account, they cannot date. The following brief conversation was a response to the question “What is it like to be teenager in this village?”

Marcus (younger male):  Boring.
Natalie (older female):  You can’t go to the movies.
Albert (older male):  It bites. It socially bites.
Theo (older male):  That covers it.

With the introduction of the internet to the village, youths’ opportunities for making social connections have increased exponentially. Youths with computers and internet access use them to communicate with friends across Alaska who they meet at academic, sport, or other events throughout the state. Youth complained about diminishing opportunities through school sporting events to visit neighboring communities, but also reported traveling to Southeast Alaska, Anchorage, Palmer, Fairbanks, and neighboring villages for other educational, vocational, and cultural events. These opportunities generally expand as youths get older and become eligible to participate in programs facilitated through the school district, such as ANSWER Camp\(^23\) or NCCER\(^24\), or the tribal council. Youths make friends at these events with whom they keep in touch through email or social networking sites, such as MySpace. Many youths reported having internet friends in other states and nations as far away as Africa and Europe. Despite these virtual friendships, youths generally wish they had more friends and expressed enthusiasm for meeting new people from different backgrounds and places. One youth (Andrew, older male) summed up the sentiments of many others when he said he would enjoy, “More friends….and getting to go a lot of different places and meet different people every day.”

**Wellbeing and School**

Sixteen youths (84% of participants) completed interviews in the School domain, reported in Table 5.9, making this interview topic the one with which the most youths engaged. Indeed, the youths interviewed about school had much to say about this domain of their lives, particularly older youths in the latter stages of their secondary education. All (100%) of the participating male youths completed the School EFI, and two-thirds (67%) of the females. Questions in this domain initially explored nine a priori

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\(^{23}\) ANSWER (Alaska Native Student Wisdom Enrichment Retreat) Camp is a 12-day program held in Southeast Alaska every summer since 1998. The program Alaska Native traditional activities and learning styles with middle school math and science curricula to promote school success, retention, and matriculation in secondary students.

\(^{24}\) NCCER is the National Center for Construction Education and Research, a not-for-profit education foundation with the mission of addressing workforce shortages through development and support of standardized craft training and portable credentials.
themes, or developmental assets (see Appendix C for a complete list). Youths’ responses, however, center primarily on a subset of these themes that included: caring school climate; high expectations; achievement motivation; and bonding to school. Findings on these themes and one emergent theme—educational continuity—are presented below. School themes and definitions are provided in Table 5.10.

Every youth interviewed about school expressed having achievement motivation, indicated by the goal to graduate or get a GED and, for many, go on to college or vocational training. School is generally seen as a pathway to getting a “good job,” which is one that “makes a lot of money.” Every youth expressed a desire to finish high school; even those who acknowledged they were struggling in school said that they to graduate or get a GED, such as the youth who said, “I want my diploma...so I could get a good job instead of being like a store clerk. I want to go to college” (Natalie, older female). Youths’ enjoyment of learning achievement was evident in the interviews, as indicated by numerous stories shared about school projects they completed for assignments with current or past teachers. One older youth talked about another Alaska Native group he studied for a school research project, and several students talked about their interest, in particular, in science, such as a youth (Casey, younger female) who exclaimed, “I love to learn. I love science, ‘cause you mostly learn about earth in science, like how come you have seasons, how come the earth is kind of tilted...I love school. It’s really fun to learn!” This theme continues throughout the school interviews, with youths’ narratives focusing heavily on their interests in culture, science, and the natural world. Several students had traveled to other communities for camps or trainings arranged by the school to learn about science and culture, such as the Alaska Native Student Wisdom Enrichment Retreat (ANSWER) Camp in Sitka, Alaska, that combines lessons in culture, math, and science for Alaska Native students for two weeks each summer. Students expressed their motivation to achieve in other ways, as well, such as one student who won a national D.A.R.E. essay contest and a trip to the lower 48 to receive a national award for the essay.

Youths also reported that their parents generally had high expectations for them to achieve academically. Parents encourage youths to stay in school and graduate, and some parents encourage youths to read and go to school on time. Other parents were reported by youths to help them with homework when it is assigned, although they said it was not often assigned. Several youths of both age groups said their parents encourage them to go to college, although very few of the youths’ knew of relatives

| Table 5.9: School domain interview participants by age and gender |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | 10-14 years     | 15-19 years     | All youths   |
|                 | N   (%)         | N   (%)         | N   (%)      |
| Male            | 2   (13)        | 8   (50)        | 10  (63)     |
| Female          | 2   (13)        | 4   (25)        | 6   (38)     |
| All youths      | 4   (25)        | 12  (75)        | 16  (100)    |
who had previously attended or graduated from college. Asked how she knows her mom expects her to do well in school, one youth (Casey, younger female) said, “My mom likes me to go to school to get smart and learn...I know [because] the last time I passed a grade, she was really happy for me. She said, ‘Really? That’s good!’ and she hugged me.” Teachers were described by younger youths’ as being “helpful and teaching good behavior” and an older youth (Coby, older male), who was trying to graduate that year, said “Well, all the teachers are pushing me at it.” When asked if the teachers talked with them at all about college or life after high school generally, almost all the youths said no. One older youth said that teachers in the past had encouraged him in school, but currently he was not receiving encouragement from teachers at school.

Despite their desire to achieve academically, every youth interviewed, including those who said they “love school,” expressed considerable ambivalence about the likelihood that they will actually graduate from high school in the village.

After high school—if I do complete high school—I would like to find a job in Anchorage for the next couple of years to save money to do other things and I was thinking about maybe going to college to learn certain things like computer specialist or something. –Theo (older male)

Two youths participating in the study had already dropped out of high school—one of whom earned a GED and the other who was enrolled in a GED course, and three youths in the study were “super seniors,” a term used by school personnel and students alike to identify youths who had not graduated by the end of Grade 12 and remained enrolled in school for a second, third, and sometimes fourth “senior” year.

The Lake and Peninsula School District (LPSD) operates on a “standards-based system” (SBS), in which students do not receive or progress through grades, as in the traditional Carnegie Unit System used in most public schools. The SBS used in Nondalton and other LPSD schools was adapted from the Chugach Reinventing Schools model

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Definition for emergent themes developed from the ethnographic and interview data.
26 Original Search Institute definition: “School provides a caring, encouraging environment.”
originally developed in Alaska’s Chugach School District and reputed to have substantially improved performance scores for students in that district. The model was a product of the educational reforms known as the Quality Schools Models (QSM) that adopted business principles in the design of educational curricula in the late 20th century. The Chugach model of QSM was later adopted by more than a dozen school districts in Alaska, with varying degrees of success or failure. In the LPSD translation of the model, every student works at a self-directed pace through a set of standards in eight subject areas, including: reading, math, social studies, employability, writing, science cultural awareness, technology. Critiques of the model include the charge that there are problems with the transferability of the model between populations of students with very different sociohistorical backrounds (e.g., Jester 2002).

Ambivalence about graduating was not limited to the older youths, but extended to the younger youths who still expressed a great deal of enthusiasm about learning and going to school, some of whom already had alternate plans for life after school if they did not succeed in graduating, such as the youths who said they planned to get their wild land fire fighting certification as soon as they became eligible at age sixteen. Some of this ambivalence about the likelihood of graduating may be related to whether youths perceived school as a caring school climate, defined by Alaska ICE (2004) as a caring, encouraging environment that respects the community’s culture. Some students said teachers were helpful and cared about them and helping them to learn.

_The teachers seem like they care about you...because they want you to learn. My teachers, whenever I do my work, I always raise my hand and they always help me. They don’t tell me the answers, they just explain it to me, explain the question if I don’t get it._—Casey (younger female)

Youths also talked about school as a place of cultural learning. When asked how he learned about his culture, one youth (Theo, older male) said, “Either the school or listen to my grandma a lot.” Every year in the winter or spring, the school suspends regular classes for five days to conduct “Culture Week,” a community event in which students, teachers, parents, and elders participate each day in a structured set of classes about cultural activities, such as Dena’ina language and history, traditional food preparation, skin sewing, mask making, skinning and tanning hides, and ice fishing. Youths proudly displayed the rabbit or beaver fur mittens they made during Culture Week, and even students who would frequently skip or miss school came to school on these days and proudly participated in the cultural activities. Every youth interviewed reported they enjoyed and would like more opportunities for cultural learning at school. However, their narratives suggested that the integration of Dena’ina culture into the curriculum was less salient than had been true previously. Older youths, in particular, recalled taking a Dena’ina language class at the school until a few years earlier, when the
language teacher resigned and could not be replaced. Youths frequently displayed their language skills in interviews with demonstrations of their Dena’ina vocabulary, much of which consisted of words for different animals or foods. One youth also recalled a school project, in which students learned from elders about their experiences growing up on the land.

You learn from asking your elders a lot of questions about the past and how they grew up and what they had to do back then in order to live….A couple years ago [a teacher that] used to work at the school and [some other kids] and me would video tape these interviews with our elders about those kind of things. And we have copies of them at the school….That was for our technology standards and culture standards.— Albert (older male)

When I looked for the videos, the school staff informed me that the videos were destroyed when a new administrator ordered the school video library cleaned out, and the students and elders’ work was lost. The youth’s memory of this cultural learning project, however, had made a lasting impression and was a positive experience for him of a time when the school was an environment that not only respected the community’s culture but encouraged student’s active participation in it.

The school narratives also indicated that the youths’ experience of this caring school climate had diminished over time, particularly as they approached traditional graduation age. Some older youths related this changing attitude about school to their desire for more experiential learning opportunities, such as they remembered having in the past.

I want teachers who can read it and experience it at the same time… I want to learn the experience way, not in a book—answers to live, how they lived back [in the past] and more responsible ways, instead of…through a book. I want to learn outside.—Coby (older male)

Other youths attributed the decline of their positive association with school to structural changes that had taken place in the school curriculum, in particular the implementation of the standards-based system (SBS) several years earlier. The shift from the grades-based system to the SBS was experienced by the older youths as abrupt and unplanned, and the youths credited it with disrupting the educational continuity of the curriculum and their perception of themselves as having an achievable academic future. Youths recalled older peers who were close to graduating when the SBS was implemented and dropped out shortly thereafter because they could not adapt to the new system.

27 Dena’ina is known to be one of the hardest languages in the world to learn (Joan Tenenbaum, personal communication), with approximately 75 living native speakers, most of whom live in Nondalton, Anchorage, and the Kenai Peninsula.
They [the older students who eventually dropped out] had to redo a whole bunch of [school work]...What the teachers are talking about now, what they should have done is they should have let the high schoolers keep going on [the grades-based system] and let the younger kids start the standards-based system. But they didn’t do that, so that messed up a lot of people. —Theo (older male)

Other youths agreed, such as one who was a high school student making all As and Bs when the curriculum changed, and later dropped out as a “super senior.”

[It was] overwhelming. They just gave us all these papers and all these standards and...assumed that we would...pick [it up] without any kind of introduction. [I] tried. I mean, there were so many things. It really made me mad because for one level there’s like 250 things you had to do...and I did it. I did all the things, and moved to the next level. And then...two or three months later they...cut half of those out, when there was a handful of us that already did it. And they said that is too much for one level....they didn’t even know what they were doing. It was hard to stay focused and it was up to you to get these standards done, and it was up to you to choose which ones you wanted to do. So we did all the easy ones first and then came the hard ones. And there’s only so much help you could get, because other kids have twenty thousand questions just like you on this one standard. And there’s so many steps you have to take to accomplish it. And so...they said super seniors who didn’t graduate when they were supposed to, they would stick us in our own room and say, “Here, do the work.” So I went to school and I was excited and I wanted to graduate and move on and be done with high school, went to the school and the principal...was supposed to help us, which he never did. I would have questions for him and he’ll tell me to [talk to the other teachers], and I would go to talk to them and [they’d say] “we’re busy or “come back another day” and it was B.S. This is the second year there’s no senior [graduating]. I think it has a lot to do with the system. The teachers are really good teachers. But I think they would have more seniors and people graduating on time if they went back to the ABCs and grades....cause, I mean, I thought I would never drop out of school.—
Emily (older female)

This youth’s sentiments were echoed by many other youths, including several super seniors who said they still hoped to get a GED and go on to college or vocational school, but could recover their academic standing in secondary school. Several of the youths had already passed every portion of the Alaska State High School Graduation Qualifying Exams (HSGQE) required to earn a diploma, but still could not meet the local requirements of completing standards necessary for graduation. Alaska Law (Sec 14.03.075) requires students to pass the HSGQE, also known as the high school
equivency exam, a competency assessment in the areas of reading, English, and mathematics, or receive a waiver from the local governing body, to earn a high school diploma. Students must also meet all local requirements, i.e., completion of the Lake and Peninsula School District (LPSD) Standards. The HSGQE is first administered to students in the spring of their sophomore year. Students may retake the exam yearly until they reach proficiency. LPD “super seniors”, by district policy during the time this research was conducted, could remain enrolled until the age of 21, at which time the district would automatically expel them if graduation requirements had not been met. Thus, a Nondalton student who completes the LPD standards and passes the HSGQE could graduate as early as their sophomore year, while a student who passes the state requirements but not the district requirements (or vice versa) by the age of 21 will never graduate.

One youth who was not optimistic about graduating in senior year attributed her uneven and incomplete academic achievement to a combination of the SBS and to having moved between schools just as the standards were being implemented.

...if we had levels [when I was younger], then I’d probably be graduating. When I got to high school we started the levels...I was moving for a few years...back and forth [between communities]. Oh, but you know the High School Qualifying Exam...I just finished my last one, so I’m done with that.

–Natalie (older female)

It is not uncommon for youths in rural Alaska to move between family households or even communities to adapt to shifting economic or social circumstances of families or the youths themselves. While this youth attributes her difficulty in school, in part, to mobility, even youths who had remained enrolled in the Nondalton School felt the implementation of SBS in their high school years presented an insurmountable barrier to graduation.

While some students had dropped out after the SBS was implemented, others left the village school to attend BIA- or state-run boarding schools in Alaska, California, or Oregon. Several youths interviewed for this study talked about following in their footsteps by enrolling in boarding school or applying to Job Corps, where they could earn a GED and receive vocational training simultaneously. Job Corps, reputed well among the youths and parents for graduating, training, and placing students in entry-level vocational jobs, had a two-year wait list that discouraged some youths from applying or caused them to revoke applications. Since fieldwork for this study was completed in 2009, however, at least two Nondalton youths have enrolled in the Job Corps program in Palmer, Alaska (more than 200 miles away, or about two hours by plane and car) to seek a GED and vocational training. At least two others have moved to neighboring villages so they could attend a different public secondary school. To my knowledge, none had graduated from the Nondalton School since the fieldwork for this study began. Thus, despite the desire to graduate and the perceived high expectations of parents and teachers to achieve a high school diploma, youths in the study displayed
a waning bonding to school, as indicated by their interviews, the rate of drop-out, and the expressed desire to seek schooling and/or training elsewhere.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, eight a priori themes related to school were initially explored, but youths’ narratives focused on the four reported above and so little can be said here about the other four a priori school themes (listed in Appendix C). For instance, when asked about homework, youths reported that they were rarely if ever given any. When asked if they read for pleasure, few responded in the affirmative. When asked how/if their parents were actively involved in their school/education, they generally said “yes” but did not elaborate. While youths did not express a desire for more or less parental involvement in helping them succeed in school, teachers expressed concern that parents were not attending or participating in the school’s parent advisory committee meetings. While parental involvement was perhaps not evident in that forum, it was evident at the events held at the school throughout the year, especially cultural events. For example, in February during the school’s “Culture Week,” parents, especially mothers and grandmothers, were constantly present and actively involved in teaching and doing cultural activities with youths of all ages.

In summary, youths’ average satisfaction with school, as measured by the MSLSS, indicated that they were “mildly” to “moderately satisfied.” However, the range of MSLSS scores and the qualitative data indicate broader variability in satisfaction with school that may, at least partly, be explained by a major shift in educational policy and practice during their secondary education and an associated disruption of continuity in their experience of school and perceived self-efficacy as students. Primary evidence for these negative effects of the educational policies is the recent rise in the rate of drop out and the exodus of students from the village to attend school elsewhere and who do well in these other contexts. The curriculum changes at the level of the school district, combined with the policy to automatically expel students who had not met them by age 21 and the local school practice of providing little instructional support to students, appear to have created significant structural barriers to youth’s educational achievement and, in effect, have contributed to a palpable decline in their wellbeing.

**Wellbeing and Self**

Thirteen youths (68% of participants) completed interviews in the Self domain, including 10 males and 3 females (Table 5.11). Males contributed, by far, the most information about self-concept, with females being much less willing or interested in talking about themselves. Thus, findings in this domain reflect primarily the perspectives of male participants. Questions in this domain explored four a priori themes, or developmental assets, including: personal power; sense of purpose; planning and decision-making; and positive view of personal future. Additionally, the theme of

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 5.11: Self domain interview participants by age and gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All youths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.12: Self domain themes and definitions\(^{28}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A priori themes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal power</td>
<td>Youth feels in control over “many things that happen to me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of purpose</td>
<td>Youth reports that “my life has a purpose.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and decision-making</td>
<td>Youth has skills to plan ahead and make responsible choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive view of personal future</td>
<td>Youth is optimistic about his or her personal future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpful to others</td>
<td>Youth has a view of him/herself as active in contributing to the wellbeing of others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*positive self-concept* emerged from the interviews as a factor of wellbeing for the Self domain. Definitions for each of these themes are provided in Table 5.12.

Like the youths in Richard Condon’s (1987) ethnography of Inuit adolescents, the Dena’ina youths of Nondalton have a high degree of autonomy in terms of how they spend their time and adult regulation of youths’ activities is minimal. In this regard, youths perceive en route themselves to have a great deal of personal power. It is not uncommon to see children as young as five playing or walking through the village with other youths of varied ages to the store\(^{29}\) or school playground. Youths of every age participating in this study would frequently call and ask to visit or stop by unannounced for an interview, sometimes joking that their parents would think they had gotten lost because they had been away from home so long. Occasionally, youths would telephone their parents to check in or a parent would come over the VHF radio, still present in most homes, asking for a youth to call home, but youths in the study age range were typically in control of where they went in the village and how they spent their time outside of school. This does not apply to all youths, however, and those participating in the study commented that some parents were strict and would not allow their children to visit other homes without their permission.

Youths across the age range generally stated that they perceive themselves to be partly or completely in control of their lives, as reflected in the following three (separate) conversations between myself and different youths:

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\(^{28}\) Definitions for *personal power, sense of purpose, planning and decision-making* and *positive view of personal future* taken from *Helping kids succeed—Alaskan style* (Alaska Ice 2004). Definition for *positive self-concept* developed from the ethnographic and interview data.

\(^{29}\) Although the community store had closed a few years prior, two homes in the community had rooms converted into makeshift stores where one could purchase select canned and boxed goods, snacks, and, in one of them, a small assortment of frozen goods. The prices of these products were typically about twice the cost of the same products in Anchorage. For example, a can of soda cost $1.50 and a small bottle of brand-name dish detergent was $7.00. The Nondalton Student Council also operated an after-school snack shop to raise funds for school uniforms and trips to other villages. Youths of all ages often congregated at the student store after school and purchased copious amounts of candy, soda, and potato chips.
Jennifer: Who in charge of your life?
Theo (older male): Me, myself, and I.

***

Jennifer: How about how you spend your time, do you decide about that or does somebody else decide that?
Ben (younger male): Youth: Me, I do.

***

Jennifer: Who's in charge of your life right now?
Coby (older male): My parents.
Jennifer: Do they have more control over your life than you?
Coby: Not no more. Well, sometimes...I like to stay up late. I like to play video games all day. The [kids next door] only play video games once a month...me, every day.

Youths generally perceived their control over their lives to increase with age:

I'm sort of more in charge of what I get to do...as I got older. — Evan (older male)

I'm on that road where I'm starting to learn things from my dad and starting to figure out how to read weather before weather comes... I'm having a lot of guidance. I'm not quite in control of my life yet, but I'm starting to get the idea of what I want...I'm starting to get that idea. — Albert (older male)

Youths' descriptions of themselves and their narratives of positive self-concept also reflected this emphasis on behavior and activities. Youths focused some, but much less, on internal traits or characteristics when talking about themselves. While they clearly saw themselves as individuals, self is, for these youth, a concept that makes sense in relation to other people and to one's actions. This concept of self, as defined by action and relationship, was evident in the comments of one younger male who expressed a presumably negative sense of himself. His view was affirmed by another younger male participating in the same group interview:

Jennifer: When you think about yourself, what do you think about?
Marcus: Nothing.
Ben: I think [he] said all our answers.
Marcus: Really, I think of nothing...I don’t do anything but walking, play with other people, go visiting, stay nighting out...I don’t do anything that much.
Marcus went on to say that he tried to get his friends to go hiking up the mountain with him, but they did not always want to go. With nothing to do, from his viewpoint, he was nothing as well, and therefore could say little about himself. Thus, activities—especially those done with others—appeared to greatly influence, if not define, the youths’ sense of who they were. Thus, what may at first glance to an outsider seem like an indication of a lack of personal self-worth or individual capacity may instead indicate, more accurately, the individual’s perceived opportunity to engage in meaningful activities with others in a valued social network.

Whether talking about activities done alone or with others, youths indicated a strong preference across the age spectrum and in both genders for being outdoors. This preference was especially apparent in youths’ narratives about how they think about themselves and what they value in themselves.

*I like to go hunting, fishing, hiking, shooting guns, target practice, and out with my friends, walking up the mountain with them or by myself, go boat ride, snowgo ride, Honda ride, bike ride, play video games, talk to my friends and cousins on the phone or on internet, swimming, towing...I like to tease my little cousins. Computer. Watch TV. Hiking....I’m a good shooter. I’m good at driving snowgos, Honda, boat. And getting the snowgo and Honda out of the mud and snow. Fixing bikes. Helping my dad get wood. And hunt. Fishing. I know how to make campfire. –Coby (older male)*

As might be expected, older youths characterized themselves as spending more time alone than younger youths, as well as spending more time in contemplation.

*What I think about myself is...I like thinking a lot. I’m kind of shy. I like traveling and...I’m good to get along with and...I like, uh, being alone sometimes, just to think about things and things that happen. –Theo (older male)*

Youths’ positive self-concepts also frequently involved doing activities in the service of others, especially family. Youths took a great deal of pride in the efforts they made to help elders, as well as parents and siblings.

*I like doing stuff with my friends. I like cleaning up, and doing stuff for my mom and dad and [siblings]. I like chopping wood, packing wood, light the stove in the steam bath. What else? I like to play out[sid谟], like to go walking. Like to go home, like to jump [on the trampoline], like to go swimming. –Ben (younger male)*

*What I like about myself is helping my family out all the time. I’m athletic. I love being outside and....I feel pretty good [about myself] most of the time...because mostly I’m a good person. My [siblings] look up to me all the time, and I’m just pretty much [someone with]...a good personality,
honest, humorous, and love being outside and very outgoing. –Coby
(older male)

Some youths described themselves as shy and reticent to interact with people, especially adults, they do not know, while others described themselves as outgoing. These differences however were not stigmatized in the village, and many of the youths indicated that a positive self-concept involved respecting and learning from differences between individuals, positive and negative qualities alike. This was particularly evident in the poetic and prophetic narrative of an older male:

What makes me unique is...the way [my family] taught me how to look at things in different points of views. Whatever you like in a person that you admire—you look at the things you admire and the dislikes, think about those for a while...and pick out a thing you like from their personality and plant it in your own. So you know that person will always be there, somehow in some little way maybe. –Albert (older male)

Thus, youths’ who participated in interviews about themselves, generally have positive self-concepts, defined primarily through their participation in a variety of activities. These activities included providing help to others, especially family, often in the form of physical labor. While youths enjoy some indoor activities, such as watching television or playing video games, they especially value their participation in outdoor activities, including those done alone and with others for recreation or subsistence. Internal traits and characteristics, such as being honest or having a good sense of humor, were also incorporated into youths’ self narratives, though these value-states are more evident in the culture narratives presented in the next chapter.

Despite having a generally positive view of themselves, youths’ wrestled with questions about having a sense of purpose in life. When asked his purpose in life, one youth (Theo, older male) simply stated, “I haven’t really thought about that one.” Another older male struggled with the question initially, then returned to it a moment later:

That’s a tough question. I’m gonna have to answer that question later....the peacekeeper of the family...that’s the way I see myself....I think that’s the purpose of my life, try to keep the balance of the family within a responsible lifestyle....The purpose of my life is to make sure everyone else’s is not so hard, I guess. –Albert (older male)

Like many youths, this youth’s sense of purpose in life seemed to revolve around responsibility for family and relationships with others. This focus on relationship and responsibility to others extended to future plans, as well. The youth indicated a strong sense of purpose and responsibility for ensuring both his own security later in life and the wellbeing of younger generations.
I guess I just don’t want to be forgotten, ‘cause...I’m thinking about the long run, because whenever I get old and wise, I know the younger generation after me will be taking care of me...and that’s probably why I’m being so friendly and open-minded now, so whenever they grow up, they should have some fragment of an image of me implanted in their head. Kind of leaving a part of me with them, so they don’t forget. That’s what I’m doing. –Albert (older male)

Planning and decision-making figured into youths’ narratives, most notably by a conspicuous ambiguity and ambivalence about their future plans and the steps they would take to realize goals. Several youths explicitly stated that it was difficult to talk about the future. When asked how they would accomplish their stated goals, the response of many youths approximated “I’ll just see what comes.” For these youths, adapting to a frequently and rapidly changing present may have taken precedence over planning for an uncertain or doubted future.

Youths frequently spoke with ambivalence about the community’s social and economic outlook in coming years, which they clearly perceive as having a direct impact on their wellbeing and the forecast for their aspired futures. This ambivalence appeared to interfere with their ability to plan and make decisions toward accomplishing a future that, by their estimations, may never come. In this respect, youths’ sense of personal power was markedly diminished in terms of their perceived ability to achieve their aspired futures.

As might be expected, it was difficult for youths to have a positive view of personal future for which they could not imagine themselves to plan or prepare. Concrete goals for the future tended to be proximal among the younger youths, such as “swim across the lake” or “build a tree house.” When asked to think further into the future, their goals were generally non-specific such as “spend a lot of time with my family.” In general, though, these younger participants expressed a positive view of their futures. These views were often concrete and focused on activities, such as one younger male youth whose goals were primarily to live near his family and spend time on the land.

Jennifer: What do you think your life will be like [in the future]?
Ben: Probably nice. And do stuff....get wood and stuff.

Older youths generally expressed a nuanced view of the future as a combined result of their individual efforts as well as conditions they perceive as being beyond their control. They talked about what they would like to happen in their lives, but conveyed a high degree of ambivalence about whether these things actually would happen. Youths indicated that their personal futures would be determined by economic, social/cultural, and individual factors. Several youths suggested a lack of self-confidence could inhibit them from striving for goals, or in even setting them, such one older male:
I could say I’ll set out and accomplish [something], but that might not happen….Things could go a different way than expected. You might not, like, get a job or move out of state or…all these questions….It might not happen, it might happen. I guess it all depends on what I do in life and how it goes. I’m gonna try to prevent [bad things from happening in my life], but I really don’t know my future. I might be a bum on the streets. I don’t really spend a lot of time thinking about the future. It’s just like ‘what’s coming is coming’ and… I don’t know, I guess it matters, sometimes it doesn’t, I don’t know. I guess it depends on the way I live. – Theo (older male)

Other youths expressed more confidence in their own abilities but suggested that economic factors would potentially interfere with their achievement of future goals. One older male youth clearly articulated the goal to live in a village, subsist from the land, and provide for a family. He was optimistic about his ability to do this if he has the income necessary to afford basic necessities.

Jennifer: Do you think you’ll have a good life [in the future]?
Coby: I think so, yeah….having my own family….I think it will be between easy and a little problems, because I [will] try to get a good job to pay the house, the water, and electricity.

Jennifer: That might be hard?
Coby: Yeah. If you have a good job, it won’t.

Another older male youth, Albert, was also optimistic about his ability to strive for his goals and navigate the challenges he would encounter:

The path is wide open. Now I just gotta go out there and reach for it….There’s just little minor obstacles in the way and that’s about it, but it’s something that can be overcome.

Yet when asked directly if he would have a positive future, Albert hedged and suggested that his success would depend, in part, on community factors perceived to be beyond his control:

There’s a lot of variables inside that question, ‘cause it depends on if we’re gonna have a lot of cultural things happen in the village… [I have to] see what will unfold.

Thus, there seemed to be a ‘disconnect’ between youths’ goals and their ability to envision actually achieving them, related to obstacles of self-confidence and concerns for the community. Albert’s concerns about the future of the community and the impact it would have on his ability to achieve his goals resonated throughout most of the youths’ narratives about their aspirations and expectations for the future. Concerns
about the community appear to culminate in unresolved conflict for many youths over their desire to remain in the village and close to their families, on the one hand, and the perceived need to leave the community, on the other hand, to get/complete an education, get a job, or simply remove themselves from situations that, from their perspectives, compromise their wellbeing. These concerns are discussed further in the next section on community.

**Wellbeing and Community**

Fifteen youths (78% of participants) completed interviews in the Community domain, as shown in Table 5.13. Questions in this domain explored five *a priori* themes, or developmental assets, including: *caring community; community values youths; youths have useful roles; youth programs; safety; and community boundaries*. One community theme—*sustainability*—emerged from the data and is discussed below. Definitions for each of these themes are shown in Table 5.14.

Most youths talked enthusiastically about how enjoyable it is to live in the village, such as an older youth, Ryan, who said, “I have to say it’s pretty fun to grow up here, cause basically you’re around lots of wilderness. Anchorage, heck no.” However, when asked if they experience the village as a caring community and if the community values youth, youths generally suggested that the village is a friendly place where everyone knows and cares about one another. For instance, one older female, Natalie, said, “Up here [in the village] everybody’s nice to each other.” This sentiment is reflected in the comments of Ben, a younger male youth:

**Table 5.13: Community interview participants by age and gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male 10-14</th>
<th>Male 15-19</th>
<th>Male All</th>
<th>Female 10-14</th>
<th>Female 15-19</th>
<th>Female All</th>
<th>All Youths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 (13)</td>
<td>7 (47)</td>
<td>9 (60)</td>
<td>3 (20)</td>
<td>3 (20)</td>
<td>6 (40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 (20)</td>
<td>3 (20)</td>
<td>6 (40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All youths</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
<td>10 (67)</td>
<td>15 (100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other youths suggested, however, that while the village is generally a friendly place, youths don’t always feel cared for due to a variety of factors, including alcohol misuse.

_Some of the [adults] care for the kids; some don’t, they just do their own thing._ –Coby (older male)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A priori themes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring community</td>
<td>Youth experiences caring community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community values youths</td>
<td>Youth believes that community adults value young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth programs</td>
<td>Youth spends &gt; 1 hour/week in sports, clubs, or other organizations at school or in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Youth feels safe in home, school, and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community boundaries</td>
<td>Community shares responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of youths.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community sustainability</td>
<td>Youth perceives community as an economically and socially viable place to live, with opportunities to remain or return as a productive adult.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Well, basically, in the village, we’re all friends; we’re not enemies. Or sometimes where [people] get drunk, then it goes nuts, but mostly we’re friends here. –Ryan (older male)

In a group interview three youths talked with each other about how alcohol misuse affects the way adults treat children in the community.

Natalie (older female): In Nondalton they mostly treat us kids and younger kids nice, a little, I guess, I don’t know.

Theo (older male): It depends if they are drunk or not.

Natalie: Yes.

Theo: They might talk to us, start talking about nice things and then all of a sudden something pissed ‘em off and they start getting all mean and all that. And if they’re sober they might treat us okay, it depends on the kids that they’re treatin’.

Marcus (younger male): If not, they’ll talk about funny stories. If not, talk about sad stories. And they start crying for a very, very long time and won’t stop.

This issue came up repeatedly in interviews about the community and will be discussed further below.

There were no ongoing youth programs, such as sports, clubs, or other organizations at the school or in the community, in which they could participate at least an hour per week (per the Alaska ICE/Search Institute definition of this asset). In fact,

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30 Definitions for a priori themes were taken from *Helping kids succeed—Alaskan style* (Alaska Ice 2004). Definitions for emergent themes were developed from the ethnographic and interview data.

31 Original Search Institute definition: “Community members take responsibility for monitoring youth’s whereabouts.”
the school had recently discontinued its longstanding sports programs in basketball and volleyball due to the lack of academic achievement among students, according to the principal (personal communication). This was a point of contention among both youths and parents in the community, who told me about their positive experiences as youths growing up in the village and being very active in intramural sports, especially basketball, as is common throughout Alaska. Despite the lack of formal sports programs, youths were frequently observed going to “night gym” in the evenings to play basketball on the school’s indoor court for two hours each evening when a community member was paid to open and monitor the gym for community members to use. This was an especially important activity in the winter when outdoor activities were more limited. In the summer, youths were frequently seen playing basketball at the outside court that had recently been built on Third Road near the tribal council offices. Also, most older youths participated in a summer work program offered through the Bristol Bay Native Corporation that hires teens part time to do work in the community, such as trash pick-up or assist with construction projects.

When asked about safety and whether youths are safe in the village, their responses were again mixed. Generally youths endorsed the village as a safe place, particularly in contrast to Anchorage or other urban centers, but again alcohol misuse among adults factored heavily into the responses.

*Pretty much, yeah, they’re pretty darn safe. They kinda tend to hang with their own age group, so I think they’re pretty safe...their families have pretty good connections with one another....well, of course, alcohol is one of [the dangers to kids] inside the village...that’s the main problem.*  
Albert (older male)

*I think they need to do more about the booze that gets in town. Like I could recall so many accidents that happened, and how many people died because of what they are doing when they are drunk.*  
Theo (older male)

*Just a little bit [safe], cause there’s not that much places, no big buildings, but there is a lot of, well not a lot, but some drugs, like alcohol, cigarettes...*  
Natalie (older female)

This was a difficult topic for some youths to talk about, and they seemed to avoid going into depth, especially about things that did not directly involve them.

Another aspect of youth safety and another of the Search Institute’s developmental assets, i.e., a priori theme, is the presence of boundaries in the community. Alaska ICE (2004) defines this developmental asset as “community shares responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of youths.” Youth perspectives about this theme were explored by asking who if anyone in the community they could turn to for help if needed, as well as what it was like to grow up in the village and how they felt about the community. Some youths responded in terms of their immediate support systems, such as Albert, an older male youth:
I don’t know. If [I needed help from someone], I wouldn’t know what to do...We will just have to see when it comes. ...[My mom and dad] are the two main people I look up to.

More frequently youths, especially older youths, talked in depth about how they perceived the community to have changed in this respect since their early childhoods. One older female, Natalie, talked about her observations of the changes that have taken place in the community:

I like it better when I was a little kid because it was better...there was more people. It was more fun. We had a lot of carnivals and like a dance every weekend...We had like band dances, so fun....We used to have dog teams, carnivals, band dances, and lots of games and a big Native dance group.

Theo, another older, male, youth participating in the conversation with Natalie affirmed her view of the village as a more enjoyable place to live when they were younger. Responding to Natalie’s comment, Theo said, “Yeah, I agree. I think I liked life [here] when we were younger and all that. Life right now is pretty good, but, uh, too much drugs and alcohol.” I asked him how he thinks this affects kids in the village.

Well, maybe kids around here see their parents drink, [and] they might get into that and they might start drinking and smoking and all that, and that’d be a bad idea.

A younger male youth, Marcus, who until now had been only listening to the conversation, expressed the view that life in the village would be better if it were more like days past. He agreed with the older youths that alcohol and drug abuse in the village generally has a negative effect on youth wellbeing.

Yeah, I agree ... Less drugs, more cutting fish, getting more wood. Yeah...like the old days....The kids would be a lot healthier and everything...if the adults weren’t drinking and everything.

All three of these youths suggested that if adults in the village would spend more time participating in cultural activities with youths, the community would be a healthier, happier, and safer place for them.

One additional theme emerged from the Community domain interview, that of community sustainability. Economic factors figured heavily into the concerns expressed by youths about their ability to achieve their desired futures. For instance, one older youth (Albert) shared his clearly articulated goal to become a wild land firefighter, save money, and build a house on family-owned land. He spoke with pride about having already completed a skills-based training program in construction and hoped to achieve
his goal of living in the village as an adult and living off the land, independent from but still connected to his family. His goals were, by most “Western” standards, modest and reflect a sophisticated understanding of the cost of living in rural Alaskan villages and the necessity of cash income to support even basic and relatively low-expenditure subsistence activities such as wood cutting or fishing. Youths universally recognized that living in rural Alaska today requires a rather substantial income compared to past generations, even under the most modest conditions. They generally consider village life to be far less expensive economically than living in Anchorage or other cities, despite what city dwellers consider the excessive cost of basic necessities in the villages. The price of gas in Nondalton, for example, hovered around $7.00 per gallon throughout the year of fieldwork conducted for this study, and the cost of electricity is generally three to four times the cost in Anchorage and other “road system” communities. Subsistence hunting and fishing requires, at a minimum, cash to purchase nets, boats, guns, ammunition, Hondas (ATVs), gas, and materials to process and store the harvest such as salt, canning jars, or freezers. Youths are aware of the economic pressures on their families and the implications for their desired futures, as reflected in Albert’s comments:

The way the economy’s going, I’m probably only gonna have a house as big as this room. Just enough for me, no electricity, no nothing. I want vehicles and some gas and that’s about it, so I can go out and get some wood and everything....I can probably adjust to [the way] my elders had their house with kerosene lamps and ...I want to try living like that lifestyle, so if we do run out of resources, I wouldn’t have to go through that stage already. I’d already be adapted to it. –Albert (older male)

With only a few positions available working at the post office (one full-time employee), the clinic (two full time employees), the school, the city, and the tribal council, youths seemed to have difficulty envisioning themselves sustainably living in the community as adults. As discussed above, alcohol misuse in the village also factored in youths’ concerns about the future of the community and its impact on their present wellbeing and future aspirations.

With respect to these concerns about the sustainability of their community, I asked if they want to live in the village as adults.

Oh, I want to live in the village...stay in the village and go fishing and hunting and spend more time with my family...[living here is] fun. There’s lots of trees and lotsa mountains and there’s a big lake.” –Ben (younger male)

32 Electricity costs are billed to customer households by kilowatt hours used. At the time of this writing, the cost of electricity in Nondalton is approximately $0.60 per kilowatt, compared to approximately $0.16 per kilowatt in Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley, or about 3.5 times higher.
A lot...because I know a lot of people here, and I have all my friends here and my family, and there’s no police or any rules. –Izzy (younger female)

Basically, yeah, cause I don’t want to be stuck in the city and just hear cars go vroom, vroom, vroom, red light, stop, green light, go...it would be very [stressful]. And on top of that, the city is worse. You might lose something and never see it again. On top of that, you can get your alcohol [cheaper]. –Jared (older male)

Maybe I won’t live here because I’ll look for more opportunities elsewhere...I want to live here because of friends and family and people I know...[but] there won’t be any good jobs or opportunities to do something else. Be better if you go somewhere that has more things to do. –Theo (older male)

Despite the desire of many youths to live in the community when they are older, their concerns about the social and economic sustainability of the community make them doubtful there will any viable opportunity to remain. They seem to reconcile this conflict by envisioning a future in which they will leave the village to travel, get an education, and/or seek jobs in which they be financially stable enough to return periodically for seasonal visits (e.g., fishing season) or longer. Or they may suspend their vision of the future altogether.
CHAPTER 6: THE ROLE OF SUBSISTENCE AND OTHER CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN DENA’INA YOUTHS’ SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

From a participation perspective, we...examine in closer focus the actual processes by which children participate with other people in cultural activity and the ways they transform their participation. The investigation of people’s involvement in activities becomes the basis of our understanding of development rather than simply the surface that we try to get past. The central question becomes how people participate in sociocultural activity and how their participation changes from a relatively peripheral involvement, observing and carrying out secondary roles, to assuming various responsible roles in the management of such activities (Rogoff, et al. 1995:56-57).

6.1 Introduction
Chapter 5 presented the results of data collected about Nondalton Dena’ina youths’ wellbeing and experiences in five life domains—family, friends, school, self, and community. These domains correspond with the MSLSS (Appendix A), a life satisfaction questionnaire completed by all 19 study participants. As discussed in Chapter 4, the MSLSS provides a cross-culturally validated, multidimensional measure of youth wellbeing that differentiates how youths assess their own wellbeing in relation to school, self, friends, family, and community as well as providing an overall assessment of satisfaction. However, the MSLSS does not assess how youths assess their wellbeing in relation to a sixth life domain—culture. There are in every society values and activities that undergird and guide social life and help define what it means to be a member; these values and activities, in concert with the history of relationships in which groups of people imbue them with social significance, constitute what we call culture. To explore Nondalton youths’ perspectives on the role of culture in their wellbeing—how Dena’ina Athabascan values and activities figure into their life experience—youths were interviewed and surveyed about their identification with cultural values and traditions and their experiences participating in cultural activities, as well as their aspirations for participating in these activities in the future. The domain of culture was operationally defined for the purpose of study design and data collection as comprising:

Youths’ experiences, attitudes and perceptions of Dena’ina culture and the impact of culture on their wellbeing, their identification with traditional Dena’ina life ways, including orientations toward traditional Athabascan values, subsistence, elders, and the land, and their sense of being culturally connected, defined as having a sense of belonging, and engaged in cultural learning opportunities and activities.

Consistent with Rogoff’s (1995) premise of development as participation in cultural activities, data was collected on youths’ engagement with cultural activities to explore and understand their subjective wellbeing and developmental experiences
during the so-called transition to adulthood called adolescence. The semi-structured interview on culture explored youths’ identifications and associations with, as well as participation in, subsistence and other cultural activities (Appendix D). These data were collected to achieve the second study objective to examine the subjective wellbeing of Alaska Native youth across multiple life domains, with emphasis on experience and identification with subsistence and other cultural activities. Particular attention was paid to youth narratives about practices associated with living on the land—hunting, fishing and gathering—and how these cultural activities figure into the youths’ subjective wellbeing and aspirations for the future. In addition, interviews explored youths’ identification with traditional Athabascan values, the moral principles that have sustained Dena’ina and other Northern Athabascan societies for many generations. Finally, youths were asked to complete an aspirations questionnaire (Appendix E), in which they considered both their aspirations and their expectations to participate in various cultural and other activities as adults. This data was collected to achieve the third study objective to examine the future aspirations of Alaska Native youth, including desired and expected adult participation in a range of activities, including cultural, community, family, educational, and vocational activities.

Results from a survey of youths’ identification with 13 Athabascan cultural values are presented in the section below. Next, findings related to the a priori and emergent themes of culture and youth wellbeing are presented. Ethnographic and interview data on the youths’ participation in cultural activities are reported, with particular attention to subsistence activities and the role they have in Dena’ina youths’ subjective wellbeing now and goals for the future. Finally, findings are presented on youths’ aspirations to participate in cultural activities in the future. This corpus of data is presented to achieve the fourth study objective to understand how subsistence and other traditional cultural activities figure into the contemporary wellbeing and future aspirations of rural Alaska Native youth.

6.2 Cultural Values Survey

Youths participating in this study were asked to think about 13 Athabascan cultural values and rate each for “how important the value is to you” on a four-point scale from “very important” to “not at all important” (Appendix B). Table 6.1 lists the values and the scale on which youths rated each one. This compendium of Athabascan values was developed by a group of Athabascan elders at the Denakkanaaga Elders Conference in 1985 and published in the online database developed by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network. It should be noted that there are 11 distinct Athabascan language groups in Alaska associated with diverse sociocultural groups across several regions of the state. While the taxonomy of values used in this study originated in the

33 The Denakkanaaga Elders Conference has been held annually since 1982 by member tribes of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, a non-profit traditional tribal consortium of 42 villages working for the health and social welfare of 10,000 Alaska Native people over 235,000 square miles in Interior Alaska.

34 The Alaska Native Knowledge Network is a digital knowledge base maintained at the University of Alaska—Fairbanks that was “designed as a resource for compiling and exchanging information related to Alaska Native knowledge systems and ways of knowing.”
Table 6.1: Cultural values questionnaire items and rating scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self sufficiency and hard work</td>
<td>1 = “not at all important”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Care and provision of the family</td>
<td>2 = “not very important”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Family relations and unity</td>
<td>3 = “somewhat important”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Love for children</td>
<td>4 = “very important”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Village cooperation and responsibility to village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Humor, honesty, and fairness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sharing and caring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Respect for elders and others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Respect for knowledge and wisdom from life experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Respect for land and nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Practice of Native traditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Honoring ancestors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interior region with members of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, it has been widely used to represent Alaska Athabascan values more broadly. On a preliminary field visit to Nondalton, I observed a poster on the wall of the Nondalton Community Center with these “Athabascan cultural values” listed. I interpreted this to mean that these values were considered locally relevant and supported by the Dena’ina tribal leadership and/or other community members. On that basis, I decided to include this in the background questionnaire of the study and ask participating youths to rate the perceived importance of each value as an indicator of identification with traditional Athabascan culture. Fourteen of the nineteen youth participating in the study (74%) chose to complete the Athabascan cultural values survey, as shown in Table 6.2.

Overall, the cultural values were found to be important to the youths, indicated by modal and median ratings of “very important” (4.0) for each value except spirituality, which has a median of “somewhat important” (3.0). When analyzed across participants, each value scored on average from “somewhat important” to “very important” (3.4-4.0), as shown in Figure 6.1. Nearly one-third of all Athabascan values were consistently rated by all 14 youths as “very important,” including: care and provision of the family.

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Adopted from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/ancr/Values/Athabascan)

The Nondalton Community Center is a modular building located in the center of the village near the health clinic and contains a kitchen, meeting area, restrooms, and an office that, at the time of this writing, housed two community residents employed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on community watershed protection projects. The community center is a multipurpose building that serves as a venue for myriad events, including public meetings, community potlucks, the community food bank, summer lunch program for children, bingo games, and classes for wild land firefighters.
Table 6.2: Cultural values questionnaire participants by age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 10-14</th>
<th>Age 15-19</th>
<th>All youths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>N (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 (14)</td>
<td>5 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4 (29)</td>
<td>3 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All youths</td>
<td>6 (43)</td>
<td>8 (57)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

respect for elders and others, respect for wisdom from life experiences, and respect for land and nature. The values receiving the least overall endorsement from the youths were spirituality (3.4) and, interestingly, love of children (3.5), although the valence of these values remained positive when assessed across the youths. Similarly, when averaged within individual participants, the value ratings showed minimal variability and remained, on average, in the “somewhat” to “very important” range (Figure 6.2). One youth endorsed all 13 cultural values as “very important.” Only three youths rated any cultural values as “not very important” and no youths rated any value as “not at all important.” In terms of age group, older youths (ages 15-19) did not rate any cultural value as less than “somewhat important.”

In addition to rating the importance of these 13 cultural values, several youths commented on them, providing contextual information with which to better understand their ratings. For instance, a younger female (Molly) commented that village cooperation and responsibility to village is very important “to keep everybody healthy,”

Figure 6.1: Average importance of Athabascan cultural values across youths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Average ratings across youths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-sufficiency and hard work</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and provision of family</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relations and unity</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love for children</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village cooperation and...</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty, and fairness</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing and caring</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for Elders and others</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for knowledge and...</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice of Native traditions</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honoring ancestors</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1=not at all important
2=not very important
3=somewhat important
4=very important
while an older male (Coby) stated, in reference to the same value, that “some people don't do their jobs...and [it's important] to clean up our village...clean up the trash.”

Spirituality, one of the least endorsed values on the list—considered only “somewhat important” by the youths overall—is associated with a variety of beliefs and practices. One younger female (Casey) stated, “[I] like church a lot [and] have fun singing church songs and [doing the rituals],” while an older male (Coby) stated, “My family tells me to believe in God so I could do good things to help people.” An older female (Emily), when asked about spiritual practices in her family, described an Athabascan blessing she received from her grandmother to give her an easy childbirth experience when she becomes pregnant in the future. The blessing involves finding a pregnant porcupine, which is not an easy task. The youth told me she was very pleased that she received the blessing, as her sister had not and did have difficult births with her children. The mother of another older youth (Zach) described a routine practiced in her own childhood of going outside each morning with her siblings, at the direction of her parents, to say a prayer to the sun. This mother also described putting wild celery, harvested from a mountain behind the village, in the river with her parents each spring as a gift of gratitude to the salmon for returning from the sea to feed them. While her children have not practiced these cultural activities, Zach nodded in

![Figure 6.2: Average importance of Athabascan cultural values by youth](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average ratings by youth (N=14)</th>
<th>Youth 1</th>
<th>Youth 2</th>
<th>Youth 3</th>
<th>Youth 4</th>
<th>Youth 5</th>
<th>Youth 6</th>
<th>Youth 7</th>
<th>Youth 8</th>
<th>Youth 9</th>
<th>Youth 10</th>
<th>Youth 11</th>
<th>Youth 12</th>
<th>Youth 13</th>
<th>Youth 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1=not at all important
2=not very important
3=somewhat important
4=very important
agreement or support as his mother described her childhood experiences. He had heard these stories already and said he will share them with his own children.

When asked to rate the importance of respect for knowledge and wisdom from life experiences, a younger male (Marcus) replied that this is “very important” because “if you're trapped in the woods [and] you don't know how to make a fire or go after moose or anything, you'll die.” From this youth’s perspective, a knowledgeable Dena’ina person will learn these subsistence skills from people with these life experiences—such as older siblings, parents, or elders—and, in doing so, will gain wisdom and knowledge from his or her own life experiences, as well. It is thus through participation in and practice of these cultural activities that one’s very survival is ensured. The perceived importance of learning from others was also expressed in the comments of an older male (Coby) when asked about the importance of the value, honoring ancestors: “They're my bloodline. They're my cousins, aunties, uncles. They do cool stuff...[we] can learn a lot of things from back then.” The same youth also commented that the practice of Native traditions is very important “so I could teach my kids how to sing and do the [traditional Dena’ina] dance moves and they could show it to their kids. Nonstop!”

Thus, the participating youths suggested that inter-generational knowledge and learning, both as students of older generations and as mentors to younger ones, is an important part of obtaining cultural knowledge and skills, as well as for creating and maintaining central connections to family past, present, and future. Finally, two youths commented on the value of respect for land and nature. An older female (Natalie) said this value, for her, is “very important” and commented that “...we're losing our glaciers and polar bears are dying, and if the bears move to the land they'll be really aggressive.” An older male (Coby) also rated respect for land and nature as “very important,” stating succinctly, “because I was born here” (emphasis added).

These findings demonstrate that for all youths who completed the Athabascan cultural values questionnaire, most of the cultural values surveyed are at least somewhat important and some of these values are very important. It is worth noting that these findings may be influenced by a bias of social desirability, or the fact that these are socially-endorsed values to which the youths have been, to varying degrees, enculturated by parents and elders and, therefore, may feel externally rather than internally compelled to endorse. Indeed, values are, by definition, inherently social phenomenon. That is, they gain relevance and meaning only by being identified and adopted by a social group; an individual’s identification with these markers of social significance is an indication of his or her affiliation, at least in principle, with the social group. That the youths participating in this research appear to be influenced to a substantial degree by these social influences, then, should be interpreted an indication of their generally strong identification with Dena’ina lifeways. Taken together, these findings indicate that these youths—individually and as a group—have, in principle, a

37 While there are no polar bears as far south as Nondalton, or anywhere in Dena’ina country, Natalie’s statement reflects her understanding of the complex relationship between the Athabascan value of respect for land and nature, the conservation of animal habitat, and the inter-dependent relationship between humans and wildlife.
robust personal identification with Athabascan cultural values. The role of culture in these youths’ lives in practice is further explored below with the presentation of findings from the open-ended interview on culture and ethnographic observations of the youths’ participation in cultural activities.

6.3 Culture Domain Interview
Fifteen Dena’ina youths (79% of study participants) completed in-depth, semi-structured interviews about culture, as shown in Table 6.3. Questions in this life domain explored five a priori themes of wellbeing derived from the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets framework (Alaska ICE 2004).38 Like the a priori themes reported in Chapter 5—for the other five domains—themes and definitions for the Culture domain were adapted from Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style (Alaska ICE 2004). These themes and the corresponding operational definitions for the Culture domain are presented in Table 6.4. Findings for each of these themes are presented below.

Alaska ICE (2004) defines religious community as “Youth is involved one or more hours per week in religious services or spiritual activities.” It is difficult to characterize exactly what constitutes “religious community” in Nondalton. As described in the previous section on Athabascan values, the meaning Nondalton’s Dena’ina youths attribute to spirituality varies. Religion and religious community is not a unified concept among the youths. What is, in most Western societies, referred to as “organized religion” occurred in the community in two venues, one of which is the home of a local Christian missionary family who held Sunday gatherings attended by a handful of people, most of whom, at the time I lived in Nondalton, were non-Native people who moved to the community for religious reasons or to work at the school. This family’s home has housed various non-denominational missionaries who have lived in the community for several decades. Resident missionaries through the years have often been associated with Arctic Missions, now InterAct Ministries, a non-denominational Christian evangelical organization with operations in Alaska, Canada, and Russia and ties to the Billy Graham family (Proenneke, et al. 2005). During my visits to the community to collect data for this research, I rented a studio apartment, located across the road

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38 The Search Institute does not categorize these particular assets as “cultural”; however, the Alaska ICE group that modified the Institute’s Developmental Assets Framework for Alaska villages did associate some of these assets with culture, and others were placed in this domain because they are associated with values and/or behavior enacted in everyday Dena’ina life historically and/or in the present day. Thus, the culture domain seemed the most appropriate placement among the six life domains for these themes.
Table 6.4: Culture domain themes and definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious community</td>
<td>Youth is involved in one or more hours per week in religious services or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spiritual activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult role models</td>
<td>Parents, elders, and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural competence</td>
<td>Youth has knowledge of own and other cultures, and feels comfortable with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>people from other backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Youth feels a connection to family and culture and has knowledge and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pride of customs and traditional ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative and cultural</td>
<td>Youth is involved three or more hours per week in activities that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities</td>
<td>include music, arts, crafts, or cultural activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

from the home, from the current resident missionaries—a large, friendly family with children ranging in age at the time from infancy to middle adolescence. The home was an informal “social center” for many youths in the community, who would visit and play with the missionary children on a near-daily basis. The apartment’s location in the center of the village, affordability, and the opportunity to conduct confidential interviews and host groups of visiting youths made this an ideal residence during field stays. A large tree with a tire swing, located in the creek next to the apartment, also provided an opportunity to visit with youths “playing out” during warmer weather. The family invited me on occasion to dinner, and I participated with the family in harvesting salmon and attending school sporting events with them, but declined invitations to participate in Bible study sessions. Despite the presence of evangelical Christians in the community for several decades, few if any adult Dena’ina residents joined the family in regular religious worship. Several non-Native

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39 Definitions of all themes and definitions in this domain are taken from *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style* (Alaska ICE 2004).

40 The Alaska village definition of cultural competence was adapted by Alaska ICE (2004) from original SEARCH Institute definition of “Youth knows and is comfortable with people of different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.

41 The Alaska village definition of self-esteem was adapted by Alaska ICE (2004) from the Search Institute definition of “Youth reports having high self-esteem”. While self-esteem is typically conceptualized as a discretely individual characteristic of self in Western social contexts, the Alaska Native definition provided in *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style* (Alaska ICE 2004) indicates that, in this context, having high self-esteem requires a positive connection to one’s family and culture, defined as knowledge and pride about traditional and customary activities. For this reason, self-esteem as a factor of youths’ wellbeing was placed in the Culture domain and explored through interviews in which youths were asked about their most- and least-favorite activities and aspirations to practice cultural activities, such as hunting, fishing, language, art, and dance.

42 I did not ask youths about average hours spent per week participating specifically in “creative and cultural activities.” Rather than try to quantify youths’ participation in these activities, I chose to explore ethnographically—through interviews and participant-observation—youths’ perceptions and experiences of cultural activities. My goal was to determine how youths’ participate in these activities and how they feel these activities are (or are not) relevant to their wellbeing now and in the future. Thus, rather than a quantitative description of the youths’ cultural activities, these results comprise an evaluation of what cultural activities mean to these youths and how they figure into the youths’ lives and aspirations for their futures.
individuals, seasonal members of the community, joined the family for worship and missionaries from the contiguous U.S. visited on several occasions. The missionary family provided valuable services in the community, often for cost only or free of charge. The husband is a skilled mechanic and worked steadily on snow machines and ATVs, while the mother operated a thrift “store” in her basement providing free clothing for anyone in the community while she also announced aviation traffic on the VHF radio, taught GED courses, and assisted families with tax preparation. The mother homeschooled her children and one other, but coached the Nondalton school’s basketball team and was well-respected and appreciated by community members.

The second and by far more established venue for organized religion in Nondalton is the small Russian Orthodox church, where services occur during major religious holidays—such as Russian Christmas, New Year, and Easter—and other, less regular special events, sometimes led by lay members of the church. Ellanna and Balluta (1992:291) describe the introduction of Christianity to the inland Dena’ina people as “relatively early, albeit sporadic”, although it “did not involve resident clergy throughout the historic period” as lay people have been allowed and encouraged in the Orthodox tradition to conduct services and perform certain rituals, including baptism.

These authors provide a detailed history of religion and, more broadly, spirituality and cosmology, among the Inland Dena’ina, in which they describe points of conflict, conformity, and syncretism between early, post-contact Dena’ina worldview and the Russian Orthodox ideology that became the predominant form of Christianity in the region. Christianity was first introduced to the inland Dena’ina people by the staff of the Russian-American Company trading post established on Lake Iliamna in the early 1790s. The first Russian chapel in the region was constructed at Aleksandrovskiy Redoubt in 1832, and the Nushagak parish was established in 1841. By the mid-19th century clergy had made contact with the inland Dena’ina people and had begun performing church rituals (e.g., baptism, confession) and keeping parish statistics (Ellanna and Balluta, 1992).

Perhaps the most notable point these authors make is that the introduction of Christianity did not overtake or significantly alter key features of “traditional” Dena’ina worldview, which may account for the successful establishment of the Orthodox ideology and the subsequent lackluster response to other introduced religions that did not synthesize or co-exist as well with traditional Native beliefs. Russian Orthodox and Dena’ina beliefs and practices were often viewed by community members as complementary and mutually-sustaining. In this way, the people were able to adopt the Russian tradition into Dena’ina society and adapt it to the local social and cultural context as value added to the existing sociocultural structure, rather than oppressing, rejecting, or diminishing it. As recently as the 1980s, the

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43 Evangelical Christian families from the contiguous U.S. visited the community on at least three occasions during the fieldwork year. They were hosted by the resident missionaries and helped the family with home repairs and/or participated in worship activities.
[s]tories of long, long ago were called upon...as valid explanations for numerous phenomena, such as the weather conditions, animal behavior, wild resource shortages or abundances, features of local topography, illness, accidents, and deaths. These explanations were called upon as instructional tools in maintaining inland Dena’ina ideological and behavioral norms. *The happiness and wellbeing of the inland Dena’ina were seen to be intimately related to...living in harmony with the universe....[and] Russian Orthodoxy...was perceived to be an adjunct means for achieving this end.* That is, the Nondalton Dena’ina indicated that they must have both their “Indian ways” and those of the church. In this respect, it may be accurate to conclude that Russian Orthodoxy, indeed, had become an inland Dena’ina tradition by the 1980s and was no longer seen to be exclusively a part of the world of the Gasht’ana” (Ellanna and Ballutta 1992:300, emphasis added).

Thus, this ethnography of Nondalton portrays the wellbeing of the Dena’ina people near the end of the 20th century as associated with a long-established and contextually-specific synthesis of Dena’ina tradition with the Russian Orthodox tradition. In the first decade of the 21st century, the status of the Orthodox Church in Nondalton appeared to be, in some ways, more tenuous. Sometime during the past decade, the brightly-colored, wooden cupolas, familiar to every Russian Orthodox church rooftop, were removed, I was told, to be repaired. Instead, however, they were left on the ground and were showing signs of decay. There has been no resident priest and the youths showed me the abandoned and deteriorating house of the last priest to live in Nondalton. Church services are held irregularly, usually only for weddings and funerals and the rare special occasion when a priest can travel from the nearest neighboring village, approximately 20 miles to the south. Despite the lack of a local priest, however, services are predictable on several days every year, including Orthodox Easter, Christmas, and New Year. Russian Christmas, also called Slavic or “Slavee”, occurs every year on January 7th in the Julian calendar, spurring a week-long celebration that culminates with the beginning of the New Year on January 14th. During the week between Russian Christmas and Russian New Year, community members go “starring”, caroling and spinning at each home the colorful and carefully-crafted village star, a symbol of the Wise Men on the biblical journey to learn of Jesus’ birth. At each home, food is served before the carolers continue on. Once every home has been visited, a smaller group often will travel to neighboring villages to star, and neighboring village members will come to Nondalton in return. Children and adults, both, go starring during this week. While in the field, I participated in a special “slavee” for children, from a few years old through adolescence, gathered with the guidance of parents, grandparents and other elders. Someone would get on the VHF radio, present in most homes, and broadcast to anyone listening at the other end of the open line. On New Year’s Day, services were

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44 Gusht’ana is a Den’aina term for “non-Native, White people.” While sometimes used to slight an outsider, it can also be used, often teasingly, with affection for accepted newcomers.
held at the church, followed by a community bonfire to celebrate the beginning of the New Year.

Although few attend church on a regular basis and most did not have a strong identification with the value of *spirituality* on the Athabascan values survey, the Dena’ina youths who I interviewed identified themselves without hesitation as Russian Orthodox, and several told me their “church names.” One older youth (Ryan) explained how he got his church name, saying, “My dad gave it to me, when I was a baby. It runs in our family....So, basically, on [a certain date], I have to go to church for my name day....all the [people with that church name] have to go to church.” By contrast, another older youth (Andrew), said that he does not have a name day or potluck because his family does not observe this practice and did not know why this was the case. Asked if he attends church any other time of the year, the first youth (Ryan), replied, “Not really. Only on [Russian] Easter....That’s a long one...we celebrate Easter and after that we go to the Community Building and we spread the eggs out and let the little kids go out first. It’s little kids go first before the big kids.” Thus, there appears to more variability in the practice of Orthodox tradition than reportedly occurred as recently as a generation ago.

For some Dena’ina youths in the village, the Russian Orthodox religion as a regular activity and practice may have become an artifact of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations; for others, however, their affiliation with the church bears personal meaning and family significance and they eagerly or at least willingly participate in church activities. Most youths, however, regardless of the institutional presence of the church in their lives, engage to some degree in religious community through activities—such as “slaveeing”—in which they participate creating intergenerational ties with extended networks of family, friends, and neighbors.

In the Developmental Assets Framework, adult role models are defined as “parent(s) and other adults [who] model positive, responsible behavior” (Benson 2002b; Benson, et al. 2012; Lerner and Benson 2003). What constitutes “positive, responsible behavior” and who decides, however, is not delineated in the Assets Framework. To determine who the youths participating in this study identify as ‘role models’ and what the concept means in the contemporary Dena’ina village context, I asked, “Who are the adults that you look up to in the village?” The question was followed-up with the probe, “Are there any adults who you could turn to for help with a problem or just to talk to about a problem?” While the answers to these questions varied, more participating youths listed grandparents or other elders, such as great uncles, than any other relation, shown in Table 6.5.

While the small sample size of this study precludes concluding with any certainty that the types and frequency of individuals perceived as role models by this group of youths would generalize to other youths, three thematic patterns were observed in the interview data regarding role models among the Dena’ina youths in this study. First, role models are more likely to be family members—such as elders, parents, or older siblings—than non-family members—such as teachers or non-related adults. Second, role models may be living or deceased family members, such great uncles or older siblings of whom youths have direct memories or ancestors about whom youths have
Table 6.5: Rank order of youths’ self-reported role models by relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank order</th>
<th>Relation to youth by type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Elder (e.g., grandparent; great aunt or uncle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Older sibling or other older related youth (e.g., cousin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Godparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non-related adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Peer (e.g., friend)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I usually look up to most of my elders that I see around the village, whoever I bump into...my parents, my dad’s parents, my brothers and sisters. Basically, all those who is older than I. That’s who I look up to. They usually have good sukdu’a [stories] to tell.

The same youth later said, “I’m sure glad I’m listening to these stories.” When I asked why, he chuckled and said, “That means I’ll be old and wise by the time I hit 45 [years old].” When I joked back and said I had better hurry and start listening, too, since I would be 45 years old a lot sooner than he, he replied, in a slightly more serious tone:

Yeah, well, coming from a different heritage, it might take you a little longer...’cause I got relatives to go to and you, you’re off doing your college thing and you probably don’t have enough time to visit elders and ask about sukdu’a and everything like that.

For this youth and others, being a good story teller appears to be a prerequisite characteristic for being a good role model and, in turn, listening to stories is prerequisite to becoming a wise elder oneself in the future.

As demonstrated by this narrative, elders and parents clearly stood out in interviews as the most common people perceived by youths to be role models. For younger youths, explanations for this designation tended to be concrete and focused on behavior or material life. For instance, when probed to say more about why she wanted to be like her mother and father, one younger youth said, “Because she has a job and she gets lots of money....because he travels around the world...because that’s his job” (Cassandra). Older youths, by contrast, described parents and elders as role models in terms of providing support and sharing wisdom gained from life experiences, one of the
Athabascan cultural values described earlier in this chapter as being rated by the youths overall as important. One youth was especially articulate about choosing to spend time with his father as he nears adulthood to learn about the land.

*I learned a few tricks about the weather. The sun dogs that’s around the sun, if there’s a little rainbow around the sun, a full circle, that means it’s gonna blow. And if there’s two little rainbows on the opposite side of each other, it’s gonna snow. My dad call ‘em the sun dogs* —Albert (older male)

Relationships with adult role models were not described in uniformly positive terms. Most youths in the study described parents having had difficulties with alcohol use or other health challenges, some in the past and some in the present, that at times compromised family relationships or safety. Many of the youths described having periodically left home when parents were intoxicated or otherwise unable to care for them. Youths typically described these experiences non-emotionally and in practical terms, as situations to be managed and with which they coped by staying with grandparents or other family members. While several youths expressed frustration or sadness about these challenges, the same youths, notably, spoke of their parents and other family members with respect and care.

Older youths shared numerous stories related to them by their grandparents about what life was like in the village in days past—when they first saw a movie in the Community Building or walked to neighboring villages, before snow machines and ATVs changed how easily or frequently people could travel to distant villages where they could purchase supplies and see extended family members. Some youths, however, described a changing relationship with elders. Older youths, in particular, seemed to perceive elders as less accessible now than in the past, for one reason or another.

*I know it’s changed for me since I was little. When I was little, I used to visit my chida [grandmother] like every other day, just to go down there and visit and see how my chida was doing every day. But after I get older, I just, I guess it’s part of that, growing part, trying to do things on your own kind of deal, so you know what to do when, well, when they’re gone, after that...It’s changed quite dramatically for me.* —Albert (older male)

*Well, there’s not much elders to visit anymore.* —Natalie (older female).

A declining number of elders in the village was a repeated theme throughout the year in conversations with youths and other members of the community. Whether or not there are, in fact, fewer elders in the village than in previous generations was difficult to determine; what was clear, though, was a general perception among community members, including youths, of elder loss and the imminent decline of the last generation of Dena’ina people to grow up living on the land and speaking their Native
language, as did the ancestors. One older youth articulately described himself as looking to his father for guidance now more than grandparents; despite the reduced contact with his grandparents, however, they still figure centrally for him, at least indirectly, as sources of life experience, wisdom, and guidance.

> I usually visit my dad and them because they visit their mom and dad and that’s where they get their stories from. And my dad tells me later on what they told him and what he had experienced from his own life, so it get passed on to me, so I look up to my dad as a mentor....and his dad is his mentor. That’s the way I think of it. –Albert (older youth)

While youths did not expand on the reasons for the shifting role of elders in their lives, it is possible, if not likely, that this has something to do with changes in what it means to be a contemporary elder in the village. It is more common now than in previous generations for elders to move to Anchorage to live with relatives and/or have increased access to medical and other facilities. This is especially necessary if one does not have adult children or grandchildren in the village to provide care and support. Also, in recent years several elders have moved out of the village to live on Native allotments in the region, placing them further away from children and grandchildren who remain in the village. Though these grandparents are only a boat or snow machine ride away, the distance and cost of equipment and fuel prohibits the daily contact with grandchildren that is possible in the village.

Alaska ICE (2004) defines cultural competence as a developmental asset that is present when a “youth has knowledge of own and other cultures, and feels comfortable with people from other backgrounds.” Similarly, self-esteem is defined, in the Alaska ICE village description, as the “youth feels a connection to family and culture and has knowledge and pride of customs and traditional ways.” Thus, both cultural competence and self-esteem involve having knowledge of one’s culture. Unlike individualistic and internally-centered “Western” or Euro-American concepts of self-esteem, in this context feeling good about oneself requires, according to Alaska ICE, a positive connection to others with whom one shares a history and continuing sociocultural context. Given the inter-relatedness of these two factors, or assets, of positive youth development in village Alaska, findings on these two themes are presented together in this section.

Implicit in the definitions of these themes is the recognition that every youth lives in a cultural context, and they signify that awareness of and connection to one’s own culture is a key element of wellbeing. Specific recommendations from rural Alaska communities for fostering cultural competence in village youths include: telling stories about cultural history and values, teaching Native languages, promoting relationships between elders and youth, and providing venues for youths to learn about and become aware of the natural environment (Alaska ICE 2004). Rather than treat the question of youths’ cultural competence and self-esteem as an inventory of their knowledge base (i.e., what youths know about culture), the approach taken here was to understand how youths know and perceive the role of culture in their lives now and in the future (i.e., subjective wellbeing). Thus, the question was one of youths’ experience of cultural competence
and self-esteem. To initially understand how youths participating in this study know their culture(s) and understand the role of culture in their wellbeing, background interviews were conducted in which youths were asked about various aspects of their culture(s). Questions about culture included, “What is your cultural heritage or group(s)?” Some youths were initially unsure of how to answer the question, but each youth responded immediately when I added, by way of example, that my own cultural heritage is Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jew and Quebecois (French Canadian). Every youth participating in the Culture interview (n=15) self-identified as Dena’ina or Athabascan. Additionally, more than half (53%) of the youths claimed at least one, and in some cases more than one, other group, including European American (e.g., Finnish American, German American, Irish American), other Alaska Native (e.g., Tlingit, Yup’ik, Aleut), and Native Hawaiian groups.

Youths’ identification of their own cultural heritage did not map precisely onto their identification of their parents’ cultural heritage, as detailed in Table 6.6. For example, several youths who reported parents’ with European American or other Alaska Native heritage did not claim these groups as their own, identifying themselves instead as Athabascan only. When asked about cultural heritage, some youths showed me a tribal enrollment card that certifies membership in a federally recognized tribe. Others informed me about the Dena’ina tradition of matrilineal descent, explaining that their cultural heritage comes to them from their mother. In addition to identifying as Athabascan, most youths (67%) also identified themselves as members of one the several Dena’ina clans, while three (20%) said they “did not know” the name of their clan, and two (13%) did not answer the question. All but one of the youths who did

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>N (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athabascan Indian Alaska Native</td>
<td>15 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Alaska Native and/or Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European American</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athabascan Indian Alaska Native</td>
<td>12 (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Alaska Native and/or Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>3 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European American</td>
<td>2 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athabascan Indian Alaska Native</td>
<td>10 (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Alaska Native and/or Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>4 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European American</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
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</table>

45 These cards are commonly called CIB, officially known as CDIB or Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood. Cards are obtained from the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) by submitting a formal application that provides extensive, required genealogical information tying the applicant biologically to one of the 565 federally recognized tribes.
identify a clan told me the clan name and explained the meaning of the name in English (e.g., Raven Clan, Water Clan).

When asked “how strongly do you identify with your culture” on a 4-point scale from “very much” to “not at all”, all youths participating in Culture domain interviews indicated that they identify at least somewhat with their culture, and for most of them this identification had a positive value, as detailed in Table 6.7. Of the 15 youths responding to this question, only one (7%) said that s/he is “not very strongly” identified with culture and no youths said they are “not at all” identified with culture. Following these reports, then, one might expect to find that these youths would also express an interest in gaining knowledge about their own and other cultures. Indeed, this was the case, and the youths often spoke of wanting to learn and know more about their culture and other cultures, as exemplified by an older youth (Theo), who said:

*I think I would like to learn more about my culture. I would like to speak the language. I would like to teach the younger generation about the culture, and the way we live and how we hunt. Hopefully, if I have children, I would teach them how to hunt and fish and go hiking and all that and camping and, yeah, I’d like to learn more about my culture. And I would like to learn about some other cultures, like I’d like to learn some other languages...like Spanish or Italian or something like, maybe even, I don’t know what the language is called, but it’s what Jesus and those guys spoke a long time ago.*

When asked about her relationship to the land, an older youth (Natalie) described it in terms of her culture and spiritual beliefs learned from her grandfather:

*When people pass on in our culture, we become a part of the land. It’s the ecosystem, the circle of life. You could become, my chada (grandfather) said that when he passes on, he’ll come back as an eagle...And then when [he] passed on, there was always an eagle sitting there. It was always following us. I thought it was cool. I didn’t believe it till I saw the eagle.*

While all youths had knowledge of their own and other cultures and most expressed a positive value for such knowledge, however, they expressed that opportunities to gain cultural knowledge have been compromised and are often difficult or impossible to

| Table 6.7: Youths’ self-rated cultural identification (N=15) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                                | Age 10-14 N (%) | Age 15-19 N (%) | All youths N (%) |
| Very strongly                  | -               | 7 (47)          | 7 (47)          |
| Somewhat strongly              | 4 (27)          | 3 (20)          | 7 (47)          |
| Not very strongly              | 1 (7)           | -               | 1 (7)           |
| Not at all                     | -               | -               | -               |
access. For example, 12 youths (80%) taking part in the Culture domain interview indicated knowing how to speak, to some degree, the Dena’ina language. Dena’ina is the Athabascan language spoken in the Cook Inlet region of Alaska and has four dialects, including the one (inland Dena’ina) spoken in Nondalton and Lime Village. According to the Alaska Native Language Center (2012), Dena’ina is the only Alaska Athabascan language spoken in a coastal area or on both sides of the Alaska Range. Systematic documentation of the language includes Joan Tenenbaum’s (1978) dissertation on the morphology of the language, work by Jim Kari and Alan Boraas (e.g., Kalifornsky, 1991), and Lovick’s (2005) dissertation on the distribution of pronouns, all of which involved extensive participation of fluent speakers in Nondalton and other Dena’ina communities.

This knowledge was limited for some youths to knowing a few words, while others knew some phrases or could understand basic sentences. Frequently, during interviews, youths would say words in Dena’ina, often in reference to animals or food items. Younger youths, in particular, volunteered to teach me Dena’ina words and would sometimes assume that I would (or should) know as much as they did, as illustrated in this conversation with a younger male youth who enjoyed gently teasing and teaching me Dena’ina words he knew:

Jennifer: You said it’s very important to practice Native traditions...can you tell me why?
Ben: Like if people ask you if you know Dena’ina and if you say yes then they’ll, I don’t know, they’ll see what...if you know Dena’ina. Or if people want to teach you Dena’ina for a while. Or if they say something in Dena’ina and you don’t know what they said....if you learn, then you’ll know what they say in Dena’ina....Like if someone was eating and they said pass the nuti and they didn’t know what they said and they would have to say, “Okay, pass me the salt” and they’ll pass it to them.

Jennifer: So nuti means salt?
Ben: Uh huh....do you what’s a nini?
Jennifer: No. What is [it]?
Ben: A porcupine. How about ggagga?
Jennifer: What’s that?
Ben: Bear. You’ll probably know this one: confitti.
Jennifer: No, I don’t know what it is.
Ben: (Pulls a piece of gum out of his pocket.) Candy.
Jennifer: I should start asking [kids who visit] if they would like a piece of confitti sh’gali.
Ben: That means “I love candy.”

Despite their expressed interest in the language, participating youths shared their disappointed view that a wide intergenerational gap exists in Dena’ina language
comprehension and fluency. When asked how comfortable they feel speaking with elders, an older youth (Natalie) replied that “sometimes they wouldn’t be able to understand...They’d, like, talk in another language, Dena’ina language, saying these big sentences and paragraphs and we would just be sitting there [thinking] ‘Huh?’ We wouldn’t know what they’re saying.” Another youth described his frustration in earlier years when his grandparents (one now deceased) would speak to each other in Den’a’ina but not explain themselves to the grandchildren, thereby effectively preventing them from learning the language and conversing with the elders. Efforts to introduce Native language learning through school have not been as successful in Nondalton as in other villages (see, for example, Aquilera and LeCompte 2007; Delena Norris-Tull (ed.) 1999), a fact made more noticeable by the recent emergence and flourishing of efforts to revitalize Alaska Native languages, including Den’a’ina (Gaul and Holton 2005), and the pending formation of the Alaska Native Language Council through Alaska State Bill 130. Most participating youths talked about studying Den’a’ina at the Nondalton school in recent years. They described the class, taught by a local Den’a’ina community member, as both “fun” and “hard” and described lessons they remembered in which they learned the names of animals or insects. However, the class was discontinued when the teacher resigned, and no longer was there any local means for these youths to learn Den’a’ina as a group. With few fluent speakers of Den’a’ina in the world, replacing the teacher is a challenge and the position has, to date, not been filled. Some youths said their parents can speak and understand more Den’a’ina than they, because they grew up in households where it was spoken daily. Several youths reported hearing their grandparents speak Den’a’ina at home, but all grandparents today understand and speak at least some English; while in the village, I observed elders speaking to their children (youths’ parents) in Den’a’ina and to their grandchildren in English. Some youths said they had learned some Den’a’ina words and phrases from grandparents’, and one grandmother took her granddaughter to the Den’a’ina Language Institute to encourage the youth’s interest in learning the language. Despite these interests and efforts, however, no youths were learning to speak the Den’a’ina language fluently at home, as did their grandparents, or hearing it spoken fluently at home and learning to understand it, as did many of their parents. The opportunity to know and connect with their language, and, in turn, speak, teach, and preserve this essential aspect of their culture has been radically altered and diminished for the contemporary generation of Den’a’ina youths, despite their interest in doing so.

Perhaps due in part to this felt lack of opportunity for engaging in cultural learning, some youths identified strongly with the life ways of their ancestors and contrasted this with their present-day opportunities for learning about and participating in cultural customs and traditions. For instance, during one interview, two older youths

46 Signed into law on June 1, 2012, the Act took effect on August 28, 2012, establishing the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council and relating to the preservation, restoration, and revitalization of Alaska Native languages.

47 The Den’a’ina Language Institute began in 2003 on the Kenai Peninsula, approximately 130 miles from Nondalton. A three-week, grant-funded course in Den’a’ina language, participants can earn college credit and are mentored by fluent speakers.
picked up a book about Nondalton in the room and flipped through it while we talked. The following conversation ensued:

Ryan: I want to learn the experience way, not in a book…answers to live, how they lived back then. And the more responsible ways, instead of being in school through a book! (emphasis original)

Jared: I know. I like just want to run away and live, relive the old days.

Ryan: I am surprised. You can use your brain on this (learning about family and culture), but you can’t use your brain in school.

One of the youths (Jared) went on to read aloud from the book, looking at photographs and pointing out people to whom he is related and recalling memories of them. The boys then went on to talk about another Dena’ina village where they have relatives. They expressed their desire to travel on the land and named several of their favorite places to go in the region. When asked about their favorite place to go, one of the boys (Ryan) said the name of a neighboring village, adding, “cause you can meet all your relatives.” In a different interview, another older youth (Albert) also spoke about how his experience of culture is related to his experience of family. He described a shift in community members’ social connections with each other from the past to the present:

[It’s] hard to think about culture. The only thing I could come up with in my head right now is family. But mostly right now [what we’re] doing is looking at each other and that’s about it. But back in the days, like helping each other, and then right now, not helping each other that much. That’s the only thing I could think of about our culture.

Another older youth (Theo) put it this way:

It would be a good experience to learn your own culture and your language and, yeah, I would. It would put more knowledge [in me] about what my ancestors did thousands of years ago. It [would] put me in the spot that they, how they grew up, what they lived off of and what they had to do to survive.

Another older youth (Ryan) related that the question of how he will be connected to his culture as an adult is difficult to answer because it depends, for him, on what happens in the community and in his culture between now and then. He said that there are many variables outside his control that will determine whether there is a culture to which he can stay connected. Thus, these youths expressed both an interest in knowing and experiencing first-hand their family and cultural traditions, both past and present. They also indicated that it may be more difficult for contemporary youths than their predecessors to make these connections due to limited or waning opportunities to access meaningful cultural learning experiences and engagement.
Alaska ICE (2004) defines the developmental asset of creative and cultural activities as youths being “involved three or more hours per week in activities that include music, arts, crafts or cultural activities.” Given the central focus of this study to understand the role of cultural activities in youth wellbeing, pilot interviews with youths, elders, and parents were conducted to elicit feedback on key cultural activities and develop a comprehensive list of activities that are relevant in the contemporary Dena’ina context. Interview questions developed from this pilot queried youths about both their participation in these activities as well as their familial access to resources—such as a rifle or snow machine—necessary in the modern era to participate in subsistence activities in rural Alaska. The seasonal and otherwise variable occurrence of many cultural activities—particularly those related to subsistence—makes quantification of average daily time expenditure extremely difficult and not the most appropriate method for understanding youths’ engagement with these activities. Thus, I departed from the Alaska ICE model and asked youths instead in a “yes/no” format whether they had ever participated in specific cultural activities such as, for example, Dena’ina dancing or AFN.\(^48\) Additionally, youths were asked to free-list and talk about their activities generally (not only cultural activities), including most favorite activities, least favorite activities, activities they do with their family, activities they do with friends, subsistence activities they do, as well as most and least favorite subsistence activities. Below is a description of the youths’ reports of their activities in general, followed by results of the questions about cultural activities, including those about, specifically, family and youth participation in subsistence activities.\(^49\) These results are interwoven with responses to open-ended questions about cultural activities asked in the Culture domain interview as well as relevant ethnographic observations.

### Youths’ most and least favorite activities

In response to being asked to free-list their “most favorite” hobbies or interests, participating youths (N=14) listed a total of 44 activities.\(^50\) Youths listed between one

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\(^{48}\) AFN is the Alaska Federation of Natives, a pan-cultural organization with representatives from the diverse Alaska Native tribes. AFN, in partnership with other Native organizations such as the First Alaskans Institute, organizes a week-long convention every year in Anchorage at the Dena’ina Convention Center to bring Native leaders and community members from across the state together to meet and discuss issues of central concern in the wider Alaska Native community, feature Native dancing and other arts from communities across the state, and host an elder-Youth conference. In addition to keynote addresses by key Alaska Native leaders, Alaska’s national congressional representatives—such as the current Senators Mark Begich and Lisa Murkowski and Congressman Don Young—always make very visible appearances at AFN, as it is commonly known, a symbol of the political significance of the organization and the Native community in the state.

\(^{49}\) These questions were asked in the “cultural/tribal” and “activities” sections of the background questionnaire (see Appendices). While 15 youths completed the culture domain questions on the developmental assets interview, only 10 to 14 youths completed these sections of the background questionnaire. Sometimes youths chose not to complete an instrument (e.g., to get home for dinner or play with friends) and they sometimes simply chose not to answer a question, resulting in missing data for some sections. Thus, the reported N varies for the various data sets reported in this section.

\(^{50}\) Anthropologist Lance Gravlee, who instructed research methodology with H. Russell Bernard at the University of Florida, explains that “free-listing is one of several structured interviewing techniques designed to elicit systematic data about a cultural domain. A cultural domain may be defined as ‘an
Table 6.8: Youths’ most favorite activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youths N (%)</th>
<th>Outdoor activities</th>
<th>Indoor activities</th>
<th>Non-specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6 (43)       | - Subsistence fishing (general)  
               - Swimming               | - Playing video games  | ---          |
| 5 (36)       | - Subsistence hunting        | - Watching tv/movies    | ---          |
| 4 (29)       | - Playing outside            | ---                  | ---          |
| 3 (21)       | - Going to fish camp         | - Going to school     | - Reading    
               - Camping                      | - Visiting friends/family  |
| 2 (14)       | - Going to school           | - Playing basketball   | - Listening to music |
| 1 (7)        | - Subsistence fishing (ice)  | - Spending time with friends |
|              | - Subsistence gathering (wood) | - Teaching younger children |
|              | - Subsistence gathering (berries) | - Making friends       |
|              | - Subsistence trapping      |                   |
|              | - Playing kickball          |                   |
|              | - Playing football          |                   |
|              | - Riding a bicycle         |                   |
|              | - Riding a dirt bike       |                   |
|              | - Firefighting             |                   |
|              | - Using a computer         |                   |
|              | - Towing (on sled behind snow machine) |       |
|              | - Sledding/sliding         |                   |
|              | - Traveling on the land (in general) |       |
|              | - Cooking                 |                   |
|              | - Dena’ina dancing         |                   |
|              | - Working on ATVs (mechanics) |                   |
|              | - Carpentry               |                   |
|              | - Spending time with siblings |                   |
|              | - Spending time with parents |                   |
|              | - Spending time with grandparents |  |
|              | - Spending time with extended family |  |
|              | - Learning Dena’ina traditions |               |
|              | - Dating/romantic relationships |             |
|              | - Writing                 |                   |

organized set of words, concepts, or sentences, all on the same level of contrast, that jointly refer to a single conceptual sphere (Weller and Romney 1988:9) (http://gravlee.org/ang6930/syllabus.htm). In this study, free-listing was used to elicit data about Nondalton youths’ activities, in general, and, more specifically, activities related to traditional Dena’ina culture.
and twelve activities each ($x=6.28; M=6$). Each activity listed was mentioned by a total of one (7%) to six (43%) youths, as detailed in Table 6.8. Overall, this group of youths has a wide variety of “most favorite” activities, ranging from playing sports to subsistence hunting and fishing to socializing with friends, siblings, and family. A closer look at these data, however, reveals several salient patterns, discussed below.

Generally, outdoor activities were favored over indoor activities, with two of the three top activities—subsistence fishing and swimming—occurring outside. Consistent with popular views of contemporary youths, one of the top three “most favorite” activities among Dena’ina youths in Nondalton was playing video games. Asked about their favorite types of video games, more youths (53%) reported favoring war games than any other type, followed by action/adventure games (27%), sport games (27%), and racing games (27%), and music games (27%). Types of favorite video games listed by fewer (7 to 13%) youths included arcade, fishing/hunting, and card games.

Subsistence fishing was listed as a “most favorite” activity by the same proportion of youths (43%) as those who listed playing video games in this category. These two activities—one of which occurs inside and one outside—are not mutually exclusive activities for a substantial proportion of the group; nearly a third (29%) of these youths listed both subsistence fishing and playing video games as a “most favorite” activity. Conversely, even more (43%) of the youths listed neither subsistence fishing nor video games as a “most favorite” activity. Finally, two youths (14%) listed only video games or subsistence fishing, but not both, as a “most favorite” activity. In the second most-listed group of favored activities, youths again favored indoor and outdoor activities, with just over a third (36%) endorsing subsistence hunting and an equal proportion endorsing watching television/movies. Only two (14%) of the youths listed both hunting and watching television/movies as “most favorite” activities, while more than half (57%) mentioned one or the other. In a conversation with several youths of mixed ages, all male, I related that an elder in the community had shared the view that contemporary youths do not want to learn to hunt or fish and that they only want to play video games. I asked these youths what they thought about that assessment of young people today. They agreed that most youths like to do both types of activities. One younger youth (Marcus) said, “I know two people that just does that (electronics) and don’t want to do anything else. But I won’t say names.” Another, older, youth said, “I have to say I probably might be between those two. Except for the computer, I don’t do. But the music and video games, I have to say I do.” Thus, despite calls across the nation for youths to be “saved” from a so-called nature deficit disorder (Louv 2006), this group of Alaska Native youths appears to favor, in general, being outside and embraces both indoor and outdoor activities.

In addition to “most favorite” activities, youths were also asked to name their “least favorite” activities. These are detailed in Table 6.9. Youths listed far fewer activities overall in this category than they did for “most favorite” activities. Only 13 “least favorite” activities were listed in total—less than one-third the sum of “most favorite” activities reported—with individual youths reporting between 0 and 3 activities ($x=1.29, M=1$). “Least favorite” activities ranged in frequency from being listed
Table 6.9: Youths' least favorite activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youths N (%)</th>
<th>Outdoor activities</th>
<th>Indoor activities</th>
<th>Non-specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 (21)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>• Household chores</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (14)</td>
<td>• Cut grass at fish camp</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (7)</td>
<td>• Subsistence fishing (ice)</td>
<td>• Playing volleyball</td>
<td>• Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subsistence gathering (water)</td>
<td>• Being inside</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subsistence gathering (wood)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Playing soccer</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Riding a bicycle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Walking</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Being outside</td>
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</table>

by one (7%) to three youths (20%). As a group, they clearly “like to do” more activities than they “do not like to do.”

Youth’s Participation in Subsistence Activities

In addition to most and least favorite activities overall, youths were asked to free-list the subsistence activities in which their families participated each year. Ten youths listed a total of 18 subsistence activities in which their families participate ($\chi^2=7.1; M=6$). These were then organized into three categories—fishing, hunting/trapping, and gathering. These results are reported in Table 6.10. Interestingly, 100 percent of youths report that their families participate in fishing and gathering activities and 80 percent report family participation in hunting/trapping activities. Thus, family participation in subsistence activities in Nondalton for youths between the ages of 10 and 19 was, at the time of data collection, quite high. While drawn from a small, non-random sample, these results are consistent with the findings of a systematic, community-wide household survey and mapping interview study of subsistence uses of fish, game, and plant resources conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), Division of Subsistence. This ADFG study found that nearly all (adult) members of the community participated in subsistence activities (Fall, et al. 2006).

Youths were also asked to free-list the subsistence activities in which they participate each year themselves. A total of 12 youths answered this question, listing a total of 13 subsistence activities, ranging from 1 to 10 activities per youth ($\chi^2=4.2, M=4$). These results are presented in Table 6.11. Youths reported their families as participating in more subsistence activities, on average, than they participate themselves (7.1 for
Table 6.10: Annual subsistence activities of families as reported by youths (N=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fishing (all types)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon set-netting (summer)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific fishing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon set-netting (fall)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice fishing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering (all types)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berries</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>(90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting and trapping (all types)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moose</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaver</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific hunting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribou</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porcupine</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific trapping</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squirrel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolverine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youths listed a total of five activities for their families that they did not list for themselves, including hunting or trapping fox, wolverine, and squirrel and gathering (wild) celery and water. Possible reasons for this finding and its implications for these youth’s current and future wellbeing are varied and will be discussed further in the concluding chapter of the dissertation. This finding may
Table 6.11: Annual subsistence activities of youths (N=12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fishing (all types)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific fishing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon set-netting (summer)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon set-netting (fall)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering (all types)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berries (any type)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>(92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celery</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting and trapping (all types)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific hunting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific trapping</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moose</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribou</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porcupine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bear</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squirrel</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolverine</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

be due to youths choosing not to participate in certain activities that their parents or grandparents choose to take part in. It may also result from youths not being able to participate with family members in certain activities due to, for example, limited hunting equipment or space. For instance, one older youth (Albert) told me that his family must borrow a rifle to hunt and the family’s only access to a vehicle to hunt or collect wood to heat the house is borrowing one from a sibling’s spouse/partner. The cost of fuel—oil for heat and gas for transportation—was a frequent topic of discussion during the fieldwork. Gasoline hovered around $7.00 per gallon during the fieldwork year, and was mentioned often as the reason why families could not travel as often oras
far by boat or on land by ATV or snow machine. The need to conserve resources may have also been evident in ethnographic opportunities for me to participate in subsistence activities with youths and families. While in the village, I was invited generously and on many occasions by youths and/or their families to join them at fish camp (a 30 minute walk or 5-10 minute ATV/boat ride) or on walks and hikes around the village or up the mountain. By contrast, I was invited twice to accompany someone further from the village by ATV or snow machine—one by two youths (Coby and Marcus) checking a trap and once by an elder who wanted a driver and companion to attend the Native Youth Olympics in the neighboring village of Newhalen, approximately 20 miles to the south.

The disparity between youths’ reports of family participation in subsistence activities and their own participation may signal a true intergenerational shift in subsistence patterns; for instance, several elders told stories of fall squirrel hunting when they were youths; when I asked contemporary youths in the study if they had hunted squirrel (or would), they all said no and indicated that they either did not consider squirrel as edible or said they would only hunt squirrel if they needed to for food (i.e., nothing else was available to purchase or hunt). This change in what youths consider edible and preferable is perhaps due to the introduction and ready availability of a wide variety of store-bought foods, something that did not exist when their grandparents were youths and air traffic into the village was much less common.

Youths may also participate in more subsistence activities than are reflected in the questionnaire results; that is, these results may underrepresent the types of subsistence activities in which youths actually take part. Ethnographic observations were made of youths participating in subsistence activities they did not report on the questionnaire, underscoring the importance of longitudinal observation and participation in annual subsistence cycle. For example, in May 2009 a younger youth (Ben) invited me to join him and his family on an outing to collect wild celery. His mother told me the family hikes up the mountain behind the village once each year in the spring and allows each child in the family to invite a friend to go along. Ben had reported on the questionnaire previous to the hike that his family collects celery for subsistence, but he did not report this activity for himself. Also, youths who chose not to answer questionnaire items about participation in subsistence activities invited me to observe or participate with them in these activities, also indicating the possibility that overall youth participation in subsistence activities is higher than reflected in the questionnaire results. For instance, two older youths (Coby and Marcus) invited me to go along on a snow machine ride with them to check a fox trap one of the boys had set, and I observed another older youth (Evan) skinning a fox in his home, which he said was one of several he had shot and skinned that winter with the intention of tanning and selling the hides. He was still learning the skill and stopped in the process to call his father, who was at work, for instructions. Thus, there may have been a tendency by some youths to underreport their own participation in some subsistence activities and, in particular, those that are done less frequently or regularly, or that no longer provide a substantial amount of food or income for their families. They may not consider these activities to constitute ‘subsistence’ because they do not involve the harvest of animals.
for food, but rather involve the exchange of these resources for cash. These discrepancies may, therefore, point to intergenerational shifts in subsistence patterns as well as in how subsistence is defined by the younger generation.

Next, youths were asked to free-list their most favorite subsistence activities. Thirteen youths answered this question and reported a total of 11 subsistence activities in this category, ranging from one to six activities per youth (x=1.6, M=1). These results are reported in Table 6.12. These results were similar to the youths’ report of overall family and self-participation in subsistence activities, in that more youths reported fishing as a favorite subsistence activity than the subsistence activities of hunting/trapping or gathering. However, the similarity ends here; while more youths report that their families and they participate in gathering activities than hunting/trapping activities, more youths report favoring hunting/trapping activities than gathering activities. That is, while these youths (and their families) do more gathering than hunting/trapping, generally speaking, they prefer to hunt/ trap over gathering. This difference may reflect a disparity in resource availability. That is, it may indicate that some families and youths are more able to participate in gathering activities than hunting or trapping, due to the high cost of supplies (e.g., fuel, ammunition) and/or the availability of animals in the region, than they are gathering activities, which can still be done in reasonable abundance close to the village and, generally, with fewer material resources. These findings also support the conclusion that the role of culture in these youths’ wellbeing means more than socialization through practice of the subsistence of their forebears, these activities are transformed by each generation—by necessity of ecology and economy, individual or collective preference, or chance—and shift in terms of precisely what is practiced and how these activities take place, both in material terms and in what they represent and mean to those who carry them forward.

Still, some youths did report enjoying some gathering activities. Girls often reported that they enjoy picking berries, and indeed women, with and without children, were observed to participate in this activity more frequently than males. I was invited on several occasions to pick berries, twice with women and their children and twice with single, adult women. Similarly, men and older boys tend to gather and chop the wood families use to heat their homes, smokehouses, and/or steam baths, while younger boys may sometimes participate in splitting wood, and boys and girls of all ages will stack the split wood. Families collect wood in certain areas and, as resources diminish over time, must travel further from the village to find wood to harvest, which requires an off-road vehicle (ATV or snow machine) and fuel. Older male youths were frequently observed, especially in fall and winter months, to be harvesting wood and younger males and boys were observed stacking wood at home. When asked if they like “going after” wood for their families, two older boys responded affirmatively. While one (Ryan) said, “More exercise, and more outside. Yes, I like going after wood”, the other stated, “It’s an opportunity to get out of the village.” One of these youths (Ryan) also related doing this subsistence activity to the ability to endure hardships:
When the power turns off and something happens, we have something to live by. 'cause if we live in Anchorage, they probably might scream their heads off and run around like a chicken with their heads [chopped] off....We just know...what’s gonna happen...and when they happens, we just play out. If not, just walk around the village, when the power’s out.

Table 6.12: Youths’ (N=13) favorite subsistence activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fishing (all types)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific fishing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon set-netting (fall)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon set-netting (summer)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice fishing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting and trapping (all types)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific hunting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds (e.g., spruce grouse)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porcupine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squirrel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaver</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bear</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolverine</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific trapping</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering (all types)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berries (any type)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celery</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus, some subsistence activities, such as gathering wood, are associated by these youths with health, enjoyment, being outside, and pride in their ability to endure conditions that might constitute hardship in other contexts. The theme of survival ran through other youths’ narratives about subsistence as well.

Overall, as a group, these youths favor hunting/trapping (38%) more than gathering (31%). And more of them (54%) prefer to fish than any other category of subsistence activity. Other subsistence activities, such as squirrel hunting, have become an artifact of previous generations and are no longer viewed as key subsistence activities by youths, but rather as traditions of last resort if or when they encounter starvation and lack of access to store-bought food. Others yet, such as fox hunting/trapping and gathering greens are also not viewed as preferred activities for subsistence and appear to now signify instead, for them, modes of sport (i.e., recreation) or supplemental, rather than essential, family income.

**Aspirations and expectations for the future**

In addition to being asked about the role of subsistence and other cultural activities in their lives in the present day, participating youths were asked in the Aspirations Questionnaire (see Appendices) about the role of these activities in their goals and expectations for the future. Sixteen youths completed the questionnaire, which posed two sets of nearly identical questions. In the first set of questions, youths were asked to rate their aspiration to take part in various activities when they are adults (i.e., do they want to do it). In the second set of questions, youths were asked to rate their expectation to take part of the same activities (i.e., do they think they actually will do it). When appropriate, follow-up questions probed for youths’ insights into disparities observed between an individual’s aspiration and her expectation to participate as an adult in a particular activity. In other words, if a youth, for example, said that she wanted to attend college but then said she did not expect that she would attend college as an adult, she was asked to explain what might prevent her from realizing this goal. Ratings for both sets of questions were made on a four-point Likert-type scale including “agree a lot” (4), “agree a little” (3), “disagree a little” (2), and “disagree a lot” (1). Ratings of 4 (“strongly agree”) were interpreted as strong desire or expectation for future participation in the activity, or endorsement of the item. Ratings of 1 (“strongly disagree”) were interpreted as strong opposition or expectation for future participation in the activity, or disapproval of the item. Ratings of 3 (“somewhat agree”) were interpreted as ambivalent desire or expectation for future participation in the activity. Ratings of 2 (“somewhat disagree”) were interpreted as ambivalent opposition or expectation for future participation in the activity. Twenty-four items on the questionnaire focused on youths’ participation in subsistence-related and other cultural activities in adulthood. Findings for youths’ aspirations and expectations for their future participation in these activities are reported below.

When asked about their aspirations to participate in cultural activities, youths most frequently indicated a strong desire (mode=4) to engage in these activities in the future. This aspiration is demonstrated across each of the three categories of subsistence activities (i.e., fishing, hunting/trapping, gathering), as well as for other
subsistence-related activities (e.g., eat mostly Native foods, teach children a subsistence lifestyle) and for non-subsistence-related cultural activities (e.g., speak Dena’ina, learn traditions from elders). However, mean ratings for each of these activity sets fell slightly, as indicated in Table 6.13. While youths most frequently indicated a strong desire for future participation in each category of cultural activity, on average the group demonstrated only ambivalent support for future participation in most cultural activities, both subsistence and non-subsistence related, with fishing and gathering activities receiving slightly stronger support from the group overall. These average ratings were clearly diminished by the noticeable variability among individual youths in their desire to participate in cultural activities as adults; youths’ aspirations for future cultural activity, as demonstrated by individual’s averaged ratings across items, ranged from ambivalent opposition to strong desire. In other words, some youths indicated that they are very certain they want to take part in these cultural activities as adults, while others suggested that they are somewhat certain that they do not.

When asked about their expectation to participate in cultural activities, youths again most frequently indicated a strong desire (mode=4) to engage in most of these activities in the future. In two sets of activity, however, hunting/trapping and non-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All cultural activities</th>
<th>3.4</th>
<th>4.0</th>
<th>2.1—4.0</th>
<th>0.0—5.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subsistence activities</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.1—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing activities</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.6—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting/trapping activities</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.8—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering activities</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other subsistence activities</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-subsistence cultural activities</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.2—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51 Fishing activity items asked youths to rate their desire in adulthood to: subsistence fish in summer (sockeye salmon), subsistence fish in fall (“red fish”), own a smokehouse, ice fish (white fish), and eat fish (Aspirations Questionnaire items 6, 9, 24, 28, 52).
52 Hunting activity items asked youths to rate their desire in adulthood to: hunt moose, trap (in general), hunt caribou, hunt ducks or other birds, hunt bear, and hunt beaver or other small game (Aspirations Questionnaire items 3, 15, 16, 21, 34, 42).
53 Gathering activity items asked youths to rate their desire in adulthood to: eat nivigi (a local delicacy of berries, sugar, fat and sometimes white fish), pick berries, and have a steam bath (Aspirations Questionnaire items 17, 22, 54).
54 Other subsistence activity items asked youths to rate their desire in adulthood to: sew (animal) skins, eat mostly Native food, live a subsistence lifestyle, and teach children subsistence lifestyle (Aspirations Questionnaire items 35, 40, 44, 58).
55 Non-subsistence cultural activity items asked youths to rate their desire in adulthood to: speak Dena’ina, learn cultural traditions from elders, be involved in their tribe or other Native organizations, work for a Native organization, do Native crafts such as beading or woodcarving, and be a respected elder (Aspirations Questionnaire items 10, 18, 26, 36, 49, 56).
Table 6.14: Youths’ (N=16) expectations for participating in cultural activities as adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Range of Averages (Actual)</th>
<th>Total Range (Possible)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All cultural activities</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.4—3.8</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All subsistence activities</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.2—3.9</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fishing activities</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.4—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hunting/trapping activities</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.7—3.8</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gathering activities</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.9—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other subsistence activities</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.5—4.0</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-subistence cultural activities</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.7—3.8</td>
<td>0.0—5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 subsistence cultural activities, youths most frequently selected “somewhat agree” (mode=3), indicating ambivalence that they will actually take part in these activities as adults. As occurred in the aspirations data, youths’ mean ratings of their expectations for participation in these activities indicated slightly less agreement with the modal scores, as shown in Table 6.14. That is, the variability among youths in these expectations appears to diminish, on average, the overall expectation they have to participate in cultural activities as adults, despite some individual youths’ strong desire and/or expectations to do so. Additionally, while it is not possible to determine statistical significance in this small sample, youths’ average expectation to participate in cultural activities as adults was slightly lower than their desire, on average, to participate specifically in hunting/trapping and non-subistence cultural activities, as well as generally in cultural activities and subsistence activities. For the specific categories of fishing, gathering, and “other” subsistence activities, however, there are no differences, on average, between youths’ desire and their expectation to participate in these activities in the future. These findings are further explicated by the qualitative data gathered from youths regarding their aspirations and expectations for their futures, discussed below.

During administration of the Aspirations Questionnaire, youths were asked to explain their ratings by way of gaining insight for interpreting the questionnaire data, particularly in instances where disparities were observed between aspirations and expectations. Of particular interest were disparities related to subsistence activities. For instance, when asked if they want to hunt (moose, caribou, bear, and/or smaller game animals) as adults, more youths strongly agreed that they do (mode=4; “strongly agree”). One younger youth (Ben) stated this aspiration clearly; when asked ‘if you could do anything in the world when you grow up, what would you do’, he replied, “Stay in the village and go fishing and hunting and spend more time with my family.” However, when asked if they will hunt as adults, more youths showed only ambivalent agreement (mode=3; “somewhat agree”). One older youth said “I want to [hunt moose]...but it doesn’t seem like it’s going to happen because there is no moose around here anymore.” This youth’s observation reflects the concern expressed repeatedly to me by community
members that previously-abundant populations of large game animals have declined or shifted too far from the village to be effectively hunted. With rising costs associated with the fuel and equipment necessary for contemporary hunting, combined with restricted hunting times due to regulatory seasons and job obligations, hunting large game is both less economically and less physically accessible for villagers than it once was. Many of the youths could not recall the last time they had eaten caribou, or described eating only meat shared by relatives in other villages. Adults and children recalled times in the previous 30 years when caribou came so close to the village that herds of 50 or more animals could be seen from kitchen windows; everyone would report the animal sightings on the VHF radios still present in every home, and groups of hunters would set out to harvest meat for the village. However, sightings of caribou close to the village had not occurred for nearly a decade; some attributed this to natural migratory shifts in the animal population, while others blamed the decline on mining activity taking place approximately 10 miles from the village on the caribou migration route between the village and breeding grounds further to the west. While not mentioned by villagers during this research, probably due to the precipitous decline in sightings, previous research has also documented community members’ concerns about over-harvesting of and competition for resources by non-resident (sport) hunters (Fall, et al. 2006). Whatever the reasons for the decline, everyone seems to agree that neither moose nor caribou are as accessible to local residents as they once were, and harvest surveys conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game confirm these anecdotal accounts suggesting that Nondalton residents no longer rely on large land mammals, especially caribou, as heavily as they once did. In 1983, for example, villagers harvested an average of 108 pounds of caribou per capita (Morris 1986); in 2004, however, villagers harvested an average of only 17 pounds of caribou per capita (Fall, et al. 2006).

In general, youths expressed the aspiration to participate in subsistence and other cultural activities as adults, providing a variety of explanations that include health, self-sufficiency, relationships, activity and taste preferences, identity, and preservation of cultural values and lifeways. Youths generally described Native food being healthier and/or better tasting than non-Native (store-bought) food, the importance of being able to subsist the land in case of food scarcity, the desire to spend time outside, the desire to spend time with family, the desire to learn from and become respected elders, and the desire to learn about ancestral lifeways and cultural tradition. However, their expectations to actually participate in these activities, overall, did not rise to the level of their aspirations. In addition to declining opportunities to hunt large game, however, youths’ suggested several other factors they believe may interfere with their ability to realize these goals, such as competing goals and aspirations. For instance, youths indicated that jobs might interfere with their ability to participate in subsistence activities, as exemplified by one older youth, Theo:

*I do it (fish) every summer. I think I’ll keep the routine. I might not if I move somewhere else or somewhere for a job or something. But I would like to do it more.*
This unreconciled conflict between the aspiration to participate in subsistence and other cultural activities and the expectation of needing to leave the village to maintain economic or personal wellbeing became apparent in many of the youth’s narratives, especially among older youths.

Educational goals, like employment, were a reason why youths anticipated needing to leave the village, thereby limiting their access and opportunity to participate in cultural activities, especially subsistence related activities. Most (81%) of the 16 youths who completed the Aspirations Questionnaire indicated a desire to go to college. When asked to rate their agreement with the statement “When I grow up, I want to go to college”, 38 percent (n=7) strongly agreed and 43% (n=6) agreed somewhat.

To achieve my goals in the village would be kind of difficult because it would be harder to, I don’t know . . . yeah, it would be difficult for me, I think. If I wanted to go to college, I’d have to travel to Anchorage and traveling to Anchorage from a village costs lots of money . . . (Natalie, older youth).

Despite the clear aspiration to attend college, several youths were ambivalent about graduating from high school. When asked about experience of nearing the end of high school, one older youth (Theo) stated:

You start thinking about what you’re gonna do, and where you’re gonna go. How you’re gonna accomplish the things you want in life. . . . After high school, if I do complete high school, I would like to find a job out in Anchorage somewhere for the next couple of years to save up money to do other things and find different jobs and . . . I was thinking about maybe going to college to learn certain things like, uh, computer specialist or something. Or going to college for electrician, learn to be a lineman or something like that.

Despite Theo and other youths’ ambivalence about how they would achieve these goals, however, in general the youths were clear that they wanted to leave the village to attend college or vocational training, or to work or travel in Alaska or outside the state, even if they were not certain how they would achieve these goals.

My goal is to get my high school diploma and my GED and . . . I [will] go to school at Job Corps for a couple years, get some training done there, get some scuba diving training, get some welding training, and see if I can become an underwater welder. If I can't make it underwater welding, I’ll probably see if I can make it in the military (Evan, older youth).
Aside from leaving for college or vocational training, one-half (n=8) of the youths surveyed about their aspirations indicated that they do not want to live in the village as an adult. Thirty-one percent of the youths (n=5) indicated that they strongly disagreed with the statement “When I grow up, I want to live in this village,” while another nineteen percent (n=3) indicated that they somewhat disagreed with the statement. Youths primarily attributed their desire to leave the village to concerns about achieving their goals in the community as well as concerns about the health of the community. These concerns centered around the themes of (1) accessing education and/or jobs and (2) alcohol consumption. For instance, Theo said:

> Well, maybe living here achieving some goals that you might have would be maybe difficult because of all the drinking and that pretty much limits the stuff to do back here and jobs to get . . . as soon as I get old enough, I’m gonna move out of here . . . But maybe when I get older . . . when I retire, I would like to live here. Maybe . . .

Natalie also suggested that these factors would affect her ability to remain in the village:

> I think living in this village . . . would be a problem. It affects my wellbeing by . . . the people in the village drinking too much. That might put an affect on me. And it will probably be encouraging me to drink or smoke. But I don’t want to do that stuff.

Evan again echoed their comments with his own:

> . . . [in the village] there are just too many people that drinks alcohol and too many people that smokes . . . and I’m trying to quit . . . so that’s why I want to get out of here.

Thus, while half of the youths surveyed want to live in the village as adults and all the youths indicated interest in participating in subsistence and other cultural activities in the future, their ability to do so may be compromised by the competing goals of education and employment, combined with concerns about the health of both the community and its natural resources. Asked how he would reconcile his desire to continue subsistence fishing as an adult with his personal goals to live abroad and concerns expressed about the future of his community, Theo articulated well a view shared by many of the Nondalton youths:

> It would be difficult. It would be something you would have to get used to. It would be something that you have to deal with or try to go back and fish and hunt and all that and get what—yeah, it would be hard.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

What does the land or nature mean to you? –Jennifer
Everything. It means everything. –Natalie (older female youth)
It’s how we survived. –Theo (older male youth)
Yeah, and how we live off of it is how it’s important to me. –Albert (older male youth)

7.1 Introduction
The purpose of the study was to understand how Alaska Native youths are intersecting and connecting with the cultural activities that have sustained their families and communities for generations and how these traditions, in turn, may be helping to sustain them, as they blaze their own trails toward adulthood. The preceding chapters presented a community-engaged case study of 19 Dena’ina Athabascan youths living in Nondalton, Alaska, including the three youths quoted above. This research focused on the youths’ wellbeing in the six life domains of family, friends, school, self, community, and culture. Particular attention was paid to these youths’ identifications with the Dena’ina values and practices associated with subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering, as well as other cultural activities, such as dancing, art-making, and learning the Dena’ina language. Data collected through a life satisfaction survey, background questionnaire, semi-structure interviews, aspirations questionnaire, and participant-observation conducted at fish camps, in family homes, at school, and community events over the course of one year provide a rich cache of information for understanding the everyday activities and routines of these youths and how subsistence and other cultural activities figure into their present wellbeing as well as their goals and expectations for their futures. The sections below describe the study’s limitations and strengths, discuss the major findings, and present recommendations for future research.

7.2 Limitations and Strengths
This research has several limitations related to sampling and methodology. The small sample and purposive (non-probabilistic) sampling used in this case study decreases the comparability of the findings. While the Dena’ina youths in this study share characteristics with other indigenous youths, especially other Alaska Native youths growing up in remote areas of the state off the “road system”, these findings should be generalized to other groups of youths only with great care and caution. More research is needed with other cohorts of rural and urban Alaska Native youths before we will know how comparable these findings truly are.

What these data may lack in comparability, however, is made up for in validity. This analysis and the foundation of relationships and trust on which it is built would not have been possible in research using rapid, non-ethnographic methods. Indeed, had the fieldwork not occurred over the course of a year, I would likely not have learned that some youths were more comfortable and willing to participate in the group interviews with peers than they were individually, and therefore would not have been able to adapt the interview procedures to this local preference and, therefore, increase the accuracy and breadth of the data—especially on difficult topics, such as alcohol
misuse or changes in community structure. For some youths, it appears to have been possible to discuss these topics only with peers present. Thus, the adaptation the research methods to this circumstance made it possible to collect more data and understanding of the youths’ life circumstances and wellbeing than otherwise would have been possible. However, the use of group interviews may have also introduced a social desirability bias if, for example youths’ were more influenced to espouse or support ideas endorsed by their peers in the group context. This is an open question, and there is simply no way to know if the youths would have shared the same observations and experiences under different circumstances.

In each session, each participating youth was asked to select the instrument or interview topic that she/he wished to discuss that day (e.g., school interview, family interview, background questionnaire). While efforts were made to meet with each youth enough time to complete each instrument/interview with every youth, this was not possible over the course of the year. Youths were sometimes out of the community during field visits (e.g., for bible or science camp or in Anchorage to visit family or attend medical appointments) and sometimes youths simply did not want to do an interview or questionnaire. Thus, the data include varying numbers of youths who completed each instrument, which may indicate a self-selection bias regarding the questions/topics to which individual youths chose to respond. Future studies could address this limitation by introducing a brief interview guide or instrument for each topic of interest (i.e., wellbeing in each life domain, activities, and aspirations) at the outset of data collection to gather initial data on each topic with every youth, then follow-up with more lengthy, in-depth protocols only after these initial, broad-based data were collected. Another strategy would be to increase the incentives, which were quite small in this study.

Finally, it may be a limitation of the research that some subsistence activities, the primary concern of the dissertation, were never observed. Specifically, I was not able to go on a hunting trip for large game (e.g., moose, caribou, bear) and, indeed, was not aware during the fieldwork of any such animals being taken by youths or their families, although they may have been. Possible explanations for my lack of opportunity to participate with youths in hunting activities include the fact that these activities are time-consuming, costly, and require the active contribution and participation of everyone present. Every seat on a four-wheeler or snow machine is premium space that must be filled by someone who is known to be a safe, knowledgeable and participating member of the hunting party. As a relative newcomer to the community, I may have simply not acquired enough tenure in the community to be invited yet on such an involved expedition. For families, in particular, the addition of an extra person, especially one with no prior hunting experience, would likely have been a burden. As a woman, it also may have been inappropriate or uncomfortable for me to join hunting trips that were made up primarily of young men or fathers and sons. By contrast, to invite me to a family fish camp, to visit a trap line with other youths present, or to hike with a group up the mountain in search of greens did not incur an additional resource burden for families and therefore made such invitations less socially and economically risky for everyone involved.
7.3 Discussion

The Dena’ina youths participating in this study are generally satisfied with their lives overall and within five life domains, as measured by the Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Survey (Huebner and Gilman 2002). The quantitative data suggest that, as a group, the youths are “somewhat satisfied” with family, friends, school, self, and community. When looking beyond the aggregate data, however, a more variable picture emerges that makes clear the dissatisfaction some youths experience with certain aspects of their lives. Some youths have decidedly negative experiences of their wellbeing. The qualitative interview data provide contextual support for these concerning quantitative findings. In the domains in which youths reported the lowest levels of wellbeing—school, friends, and community—several themes repeatedly emerged in the interview data related to youths’ unease about the social connectivity and engagement of adults in the community (i.e., teachers, elders, community leaders) and the availability of supportive peers. Finally, these data suggest the critical role of cultural activities in the subjective wellbeing of contemporary Dena’ina youths. However, these youths do not consistently experience themselves as having opportunities to engage in these activities, due to multiple factors, discussed briefly below.

School as a structural barrier to youth wellbeing

Youths’ narratives suggest that school in Nondalton has, with the exception of the Culture Week activities discussed in Chapter 6, for many ceased to be a place of academic achievement, learning, and support. This appears to be especially true for the older youths and so-called super seniors who experienced a tumultuous transition from the previous grade-based curriculum to the newer standards based system, as discussed in Chapter 5. While some younger youths expressed positive experience of school and school-based learning, every older youth expressed at least moderate ambivalence about his or her ability to graduate and expressed specific concerns about the current school climate. This finding was paradoxical in lieu of the youths’ clearly expressed aspirations to go to college, acquire advanced skills, and/or have jobs in the future that are, as one older female put it, “better than a store clerk.”

The former president of the University of Alaska, Mark Hamilton, agreed with these youths’ assessment of their educational needs when, in 2008, he was reported in the Anchorage Daily News to have said, “We have to stop saying, ‘College isn’t for everyone.’ Post-secondary education is for nearly everyone unless your goal is to be the head fry guy at McDonald’s” (Holland 2008). However, he diverged from their assessment of the problem when he described it as “cultural” and explained this to mean that parents and families do not value education. Nondalton’s Dena’ina youths participating in this study did not indicate a perceived lack of support from their parents or families for their education in and beyond secondary school; indeed, their parents were described as being very supportive of their efforts and aspirations to achieve academically. Rather, they suggested that the educational system was ill-equipped in its current state to teach them in the manner that is culturally appropriate, and in which they need and want to learn, through observation and first-hand experience in sustained relationship with trusted elders. It is a short step to imagine how deeply
discouraging and confusing it is to seek guidance from an educational system (and the authorities in it) that places fault for its failures squarely on the shoulders of those in whom youths place the most trust and respect and, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, view as their role models.

The educational system appears to have created structural barriers to youths’ academic achievement and, in doing so, may have diminished both their present wellbeing and their ability to achieve future aspirations. These barriers include a curriculum that was designed for a primarily urban, primarily non-Native population of youths. Furthermore, placing responsibility for academic failures on families while failing to critically examine the culture of the educational system further polarizes the youths and their community from the educational system and does not appear, thus far, to be producing constructive resolutions to the troubles of the educational system or the youths it serves. New, creative and constructive educational solutions are needed for the students and communities of rural Alaska, such as the Dena’ina youths of Nondalton, and evidence-based, indigenous education research is needed to develop them.

*Relationships as support and stressor*

The domain of friends was another in which youths’ experiences of their own wellbeing were variable and sometimes concerning. While youths unanimously view friends as an important part of their lives, they also recognize friends can have both positive and negative influences on their wellbeing. For some youths, peer influences manifested in ways that provided a positive counter to the negative effects of stress in other domains of their lives, such as school or family. However, youths also experienced peer influences that were less positive and encouraged them to partake in behavior they knew would ultimately compromise their wellbeing. Youths’ perspectives on the role of friends in their lives demonstrate a nuanced understanding of social support and relationships. That is, while youths’ clearly see relationships with friends, family, and others as a necessary component in their wellbeing, they also understand from first-hand experience that not all social support is positive and that they must, therefore, navigate these relationships carefully with regard to their impact on the youths’ wellbeing. More and expanded opportunities are needed for youths to build positive peer relationships that promote health and wellbeing. Efforts should focus on creating and supporting opportunities for more youths to participate in peer-based culturally meaningful activities, such as Native Youth Olympics and subsistence or other camps (e.g., hunting camp or teen culture camp), as well as other valued activities, such as school sports teams and music groups, that could capitalize on youths’ existing interests in physical activity and the arts.

*Community continuity in question*

Data related to youths’ experiences of friends intersected heavily with their experiences of the community. For instance, they felt that while the small size of the community fostered a strong sense of caring and closeness among friends and families in the village, it also limited the opportunities for making new friends and reduced opportunities for making positive peer connections. Youths were creative in finding ways to overcome these barriers, however, for example, by using the recent
introduction of satellite internet, social media, and cell phones\textsuperscript{56} to maintain existing friendships and forge new ones with people as near as Anchorage and as far away as Texas and Germany. Youths’ desire to expand their social networks also leads many to take advantage of the plethora of auxiliary learning opportunities available outside the community, such as ANSWER camp and others discussed in Chapter 5. These often take place in the summer months, and I have previously described these vocational, academic, and religious gatherings as comprising “camps” that compete with summer fish camp and other subsistence activities for youths’ time and energy (Fall 2010). More than their opportunities for peer relationships, however, youths described in detail their concerns for the future of their community and their ability to remain connected to it and the sociocultural history it represents to them. These concerns centered on their observations that adults in the community are less engaged and that leadership is less evident to them than they recall from past personal experiences and/or stories told by parents and grandparents. They describe with nostalgia a bygone era in which the community was characterized by more collective activity (e.g., dances and concerts) and in which people, by their accounts, cared more about one another as evidenced by their positive engagement with one another. Material evidence to support these concerns is found in youths’ recollections of several business closures in recent years, including the store, as well as in the loss of a resident priest and the outmigration of nearly a quarter of the community population in the past decade.

Culture as a key protective factor for positive development

While Dena’ina youths’ participation activities outside the village may signify to some a decline in their identification with Dena’ina culture, this is not the case for the youths in this study. Rather, their narratives and the other data presented herein indicate a strong identification with their Alaska Native heritage, with the values and activities associated with that heritage, and particularly those involved with living on the land and learning from life experiences. These youths face choices and opportunities that did not exist in their parents’ and grandparents’ youths. They are, therefore, truly building new paths in their journeys through adolescence into adulthood. As with forging all new passageways, it takes time to get from one point to another and the risks are greater for pioneers than for future generations of travelers, but also so may be the rewards. As contemporary Dena’ina youths engage in more diverse activities—including some away from home—than did previous generations, their adoption of traditional cultural roles and activities, such as subsistence hunting and fishing, may be delayed. Youths may learn some skills at later ages than did their parents or grandparents, but that does not mean they will not learn them. Settersten and Ray (2010) contend that this sort of intentional “developmental delay”, while occurring in diverse ways in different contexts, signifies the awareness of youths coming of age in a world much more complex than that of their parents’ generation of the challenges they face and the multitude of assets they need to become mature adults. This conclusion is supported in Nondalton by the observation made during the course of the fieldwork done for this

\textsuperscript{56} Cellular phone service became available in Nondalton and many other rural Alaska villages that are not on “the road system” about one year after data was collected for this dissertation.
study of many young adults in their mid-20s coming back to the village from other parts of Alaska and “Outside” to put up fish in the summer with their families and, as one young woman told me, to learn these practices from her elders “before it is too late.” While this young woman had left the village to pursue education and employment outside the village, she returned to help her family harvest their fish for the year and learn from her mother so she could teach her children one day. While learning these skills at a later age than her mother did, she was still learning them and integrating them into a life journey much different and arguably more complex than anyone before her in the family.

This research supports the work of other anthropologists, such as Fienup-Riordan and Hensel, that suggests that subsistence as a tool for political discourse, negotiation of power, and the instantiation of contested identities. In other words, subsistence doesn’t just feed the physical body, but sustains and represents the “emotional and cultural wellbeing of Alaska Native peoples” (Alaska Federation of Natives and Alaska Native Knowledge Network 1999) that is critical to overcome historical trauma and contemporary threats to survival, such as the extremely high rates of suicide among Alaska Native young men. Furthermore, it suggests that subsistence practice, specifically, and cultural activities, broadly, constitute important developmental assets in the wellbeing of Dena’ina youths and young adults. Among the most compelling evidence for this conclusion is the finding that for Dena’ina youths, the development of a positive self-concept (i.e., self-esteem) is more closely associated with engagement in socially-valued activity (i.e., doing), such as being helpful to others, than with individual personality characteristics (i.e., being).

However, the data suggest that some youths do not have the opportunities they would like to engage in subsistence and other cultural activities, such as Dena’ina language, dance, sewing, art and just “traveling” on the land. Opportunities to engage in these activities are not evenly distributed across the cohort. They attributed this disparity to social, economic, environmental and other barriers. For example, family members’ alcohol misuse or lack of cash to purchase fuel and equipment prohibited them from participating. Also, positive opportunities and interests such attending summer science school, bible camp or traveling to see family in Anchorage interfere with unchangeable cycles of the salmon. Individually these “barriers” make it difficult to practice subsistence activities, but combined they can form the perfect storm to prohibit youths from engaging in these cultural activities.

The incongruities between youths valued cultural activities and actual engagement in them may represent the most recent iteration of the disenfranchisement of Alaska Native youths from their cultural traditions, a contemporary analogue of their grandparents’ experiences in Indian boarding schools under assimilation policy. This distancing of youths from their cultural practice and birthright likely (and ironically) creates or exacerbates the ‘generation gap’ observed by some youths and Elders, despite the expressed desire of both cohorts to have more meaningful and engaged contact with each other around their shared cultural heritage.
7.4 Future directions

Future research should examine how other cohorts of Alaska Native youths are navigating the crossroads of age and culture. There are many similarities between social, political and economic environments of the youths of Nondalton and those of the many Athabascan, Yup’ik, Inupiat, Sugpiaq, Unaangan, Tlingit, Haida, and other indigenous youths living throughout rural Alaska. However, the youths of Nondalton, by their own words, represent only themselves and, as such, their views should not be taken as proxy for the views and experiences of diverse Alaska Native youths. We need to hear what they are willing to share and understand better how they are using their experiences to shape their social worlds. Only through such understanding will we learn how to support youths in creatively and constructively navigating this important transition in the history of their lives and their communities. Future studies should also follow cohorts of Alaska Native youths longitudinally to study how they variously create and articulate new forms of cultural ‘hybridity’—the “making of something new through the combination of existing things and patterns…that reflects how global cultures are assimilated in the locality, and how non-western cultures impact upon the West” (Nilan and Feixa 2006:2). Such critical studies of youth are needed for us to understand our highly complex world and develop policies, programs and practices that promote the health and wellbeing of all youths.

7.5 Conclusion

The Dena’ina youths of Nondalton are aware of the challenges and the benefits of living in a rural Alaska community in an increasingly global world. For them, there is no contradiction in identifying with both “traditional” and “western” cultures. They are at fish camp and on Facebook, often at the same time. They are actively looking for ways to overcome obstacles and chart a safe course. But the vehicles for articulating their cultural ‘plurality’ as they move toward adulthood are not yet clear, and the outcomes of this journey are yet undetermined.

This study contributes to our understanding of the dilemmas faced by contemporary indigenous youths coming of age in societies undergoing rapid social change in an era of increasing globalization. Moreover, it contributes to a broader understanding of the important role of cultural activities in human development as a protective factor in youth wellbeing. The findings suggest that wellbeing and protection against harm will ultimately be afforded those youths with access to the developmental asset of activities that foster a meaningful and active connection to their evolving cultural history. These activities will vary over time and geography, but for contemporary Dena’ina youths they include being able to live on the land, maintain trusted relationships with supportive elders and peers, and identify with the cultural values that have sustained their families for centuries. In Inland Dena’ina country, and perhaps in other Alaska Native communities as well, subsistence and other cultural activities, in principal and in practice, are protective factors that promote youth wellbeing by fostering connectivity, continuity and coherence to valued others—past, present and future.
I would like to know what thoughts about life you’ve had during the past several weeks. Think about how you spend each day and night and then think about how your life has been during most of this time. I will ask some questions about your satisfaction with different parts of your life. For each question I read, you will select the card that says how much you agree or disagree with each statement. It is important to know what you REALLY think, so please answer the question the way you really feel, not how you think you should. This is NOT a test. There are NO right or wrong answers. Your answers will NOT affect your grades, and no one will be told your answers.

| Card 1 if you STRONGLY DISAGREE with the sentence |
| Card 2 if you MODERATELY DISAGREE with the sentence |
| Card 3 if you MILDLY DISAGREE with the sentence |
| Card 4 if you MILDLY AGREE with the sentence |
| Card 5 if you MODERATELY AGREE with the sentence |
| Card 6 if you STRONGLY AGREE with the sentence |

1. My friends are nice to me
2. I am fun to be around
3. I feel bad at school
4. I have a bad time with my friends
5. There are lots of things I can do well
6. I learn a lot at school
7. I like spending time with my parents
8. My family is better than most
9. There are many things about school I don't like
10. I think I am good looking
11. My friends are great
12. My friends will help me if I need it
13. I wish I didn't have to go to school
14. I like myself
15. There are lots of fun things to do where I live
16. My friends treat me well
17. Most people like me
| 18. I enjoy being at home with my family |
| 19. My family gets along well together |
| 20. I look forward to going to school |
| 21. My parents treat me fairly |
| 22. I like being in school |
| 23. My friends are mean to me |
| 24. I wish I had different friends |
| 25. School is interesting |
| 26. I enjoy school activities |
| 27. I wish I lived in a different house |
| 28. Members of my family talk nicely to one another |
| 29. I have a lot of fun with my friends |
| 30. My parents and I do fun things together |
| 31. I like my village |
| 32. I wish I lived somewhere else |
| 33. I am a nice person |
| 34. This town is filled with mean people |
| 35. I like to try new things |
| 36. My family's house is nice |
| 37. I like the people who live in the village |
| 38. I have enough friends |
| 39. I wish there were different people in my village |
| 40. I like where I live |
APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant ID #: ___________________

Date of interview: ____________

**Family**

*I’d like to start by asking you to tell me a little about yourself and your family.*

1) What is your name? _____________________________________________

2) What is your sex?
   Male   
   Female

3) What is your birth date? _____month _____day _____year

4) What is your current age? __________

5) Where were you born? __________________________

6) Who lives with you right now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relation to you?</th>
</tr>
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7) How long have you lived in Nondalton? _____ yrs

8) Where did you live before that? __________________________

9) How long did you live there? _____ yrs

10) Who lived with you there?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Relation to child?</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Repeat #8-#10 until all residences are listed. Record additional information on back of sheet.

11) Are you ever in charge of taking care of your younger siblings or other children?
   Yes Who?___________________________________________________________
   No
   Not applicable (no younger sibs)

12) How many hours a day on average do you care or look out for your younger siblings?
   † None
   † 1 to 2 hours each day
   † 3 to 5 hours each day
   † 6 to 10 hours each day
   † More than 10 hours each day
   † Not applicable

13) Does anyone in your family, including you, have any special needs, like a developmental disability or a chronic health problem?
   † Yes Who/what?____________________________________________________
   † No

14) Do you have any siblings who do not currently live with you?
   † Yes
   † No
   If yes, please tell me a little about them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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Use back of sheet to record additional information.

15) Have you ever lived with family members other than your parents?
   Yes
   No
   If yes, please tell me more about that.
   Use back of sheet to record additional information.

16) Have you ever lived with people who were not members of your family?
   Yes
   No
   If yes, please tell me more about that.
   Use back of sheet to record additional information.
17) In the last year, where did your family get their income (check all that apply):
- Employment, part-time, seasonal
- Employment, part-time, year-round
- Employment, full-time, seasonal
- Employment, full-time, year-round
- Gifts or loans
- Transfers (e.g., WIC, TANF)
- Native Corporation Dividends
- Federal Economic Stimulus
- PFD/ State Energy Rebates
- Other

Describe: ______________________

18) What does your mom do for work (type of work and job title)?

19) Is this seasonal or year-round work? If seasonal, which season(s)? Part time or full time?
   - Seasonal: _________________________  Part-time
   - Year-round                        Full-time

   a) How many hours a week does he/she work?
   - 50 or more hours each week
   - 40 to 49 hours each week
   - 30 to 39 hours each week
   - 20 to 29 hours each week
   - 10 to 19 hours each week
   - 0 to 9 hours each week

20) What does your dad do for work (type of work and job title)?

   a) Is this seasonal or year-round work? If seasonal, which season(s)? Part-time or full-time?
   - Seasonal: _________________________  Part-time
   - Year-round                        Full-time

   b) How many hours a week does he work?
   - 50 or more hours each week
   - 40 to 49 hours each week
   - 30 to 39 hours each week
   - 20 to 29 hours each week
   - 10 to 19 hours each week
   - 0 to 9 hours each week
21) If other adults in house or not living with parents: What does your caretaker (e.g., grandmother) do for work?

   a) Is this seasonal or year-round work? If seasonal, which season(s)? Part time or full time?
      Seasonal: ________________________ Part-time
      Year-round ______________________ Full-time

   b) How many hours a week does he/she work?
      50 or more hours each week
      40 to 49 hours each week
      30 to 39 hours each week
      20 to 29 hours each week
      10 to 19 hours each week
      0 to 9 hours each week

Cultural/Tribal Information

22) What is your heritage or cultural background? ________________________________

23) How strongly do you identify with your cultural group (how important is it to you)?
   Very strongly Somewhat strongly Not very strongly Not at all

24) What is your parents’ cultural group/tribe(s)?
   Mother ________________________________
   Father ________________________________

25) How strongly do you think your father identifies with his cultural group(s)?
   Very strongly Somewhat strongly Not very strongly Not at all

26) How strongly do you think your mother identifies with her cultural heritage or group(s)?
   Very strongly Somewhat strongly Not very strongly Not at all

27) If you do not live with your parents, what would your caretaker (e.g., grandmother) describe as his or her cultural heritage or group(s)?
   Caretaker ________________________________
   Relationship to Youth ________________________________
28) How strongly do you think she/he identifies with her/his cultural heritage or group(s)?
   - Very strongly
   - Somewhat strongly
   - Not very strongly
   - Not at all

29) Do you speak any languages other than English? Would you say you speak each of these very well, pretty well, a little, or not very well?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Pretty well</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Not very well</th>
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</table>

30) What languages do your parents speak? For each of these people, would you say that he/she speaks each language very well, pretty well, a little, or not very well?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Pretty well</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Not very well</th>
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</table>

31) What languages do your grandparents speak? For each of these people, would you say that he/she speaks each language very well, pretty well, a little, or not very well?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Pretty well</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Not very well</th>
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32) Would you describe yourself as someone who follows a spiritual or religious tradition?
   - Yes  What tradition? ________________________________
   - No

33) Have you ever attended a culture camp?
   - Yes  Where? ________________________________
   - No
34) Have you ever participated in a Native dance group?
   Yes
   No

35) Have you ever participated in a traditional potlatch?
   Yes
   No

36) Have you ever participated in a traditional talking circle?
   Yes   Where? ________________________________
   No

37) Have you ever participated in a youth-elder conference or gathering?
   Yes   Where? ________________________________
   No

38) Have you ever participated in a Native language institute?
   Yes   Where? ________________________________
   No

39) Have you ever attended the annual convention of AFN (Alaska Federation of Natives)?
   Yes
   No

40) Have you ever participated in a fiddling contest or exhibition?
   Yes
   No

41) Have you ever attended or participated in the Native (Eskimo-Indian) Olympics?
   Yes
   No

42) Have you ever visited the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage or any other cultural museum?
   Yes   Which one? ________________________________
   No

43) Have you ever attended or visited any other Native events or organizations?
   Yes   What? ________________________________
   No

44) Are you an enrolled tribal member?
   Yes   Which tribe(s)? ________________________________
45) If not an enrolled tribal member, do you consider yourself to be a member of a tribe?
   - Yes Which tribe(s)? ________________________________
   - No
   - Not applicable

46) (If a member of a tribe) Do you belong to a clan?
   - Yes Which clan(s)? ________________________________
   - No
   - Not applicable

47) Is your mother an enrolled tribal member?
   - Yes Which tribe(s)? ________________________________
   - No

48) Is your father an enrolled tribal member?
   - Yes Which tribe(s)? ________________________________
   - No

49) Have you ever attended a tribal council meeting?
   - Yes
   - No

50) Do you have a steam bath where you live now?
   - Yes
   - No

51) Has anyone in your immediate family that you know of ever had a team of working sled dogs?
   - Yes Who? ________________________________
   - No

52) Has anyone in your extended family that you know of ever had a team of working sled dogs?
   - Yes Who? ________________________________
   - No

53) Does your family currently own working snow machines that are used for hunting or trapping?
   - Yes How many? _________
   - No
54) Does your family currently own a working Honda (ATV) that is used for hunting or trapping?
   - Yes    How many? __________
   - No

55) Does your family own a shotgun or rifle used for hunting?
   - Yes    How many? __________
   - No

56) Does your family currently heat with wood?
   - Yes
   - No

57) Does anyone in your family currently own and/or run a trap line?
   - Own and run
   - Own, not run
   - Not own or run

58) Does your family currently own a boat(s) used for fishing or hunting?

59) Next, I am going to list some values. Think about each value. Then tell me how important the value is to you. There are NO right or wrong answers. The important thing is what you really think.

   a) Self-sufficiency and Hard Work
      - Very important
      - Somewhat important
      - Not very important
      - Not at all important

   b) Care and Provision for the Family
      - Very important
      - Somewhat important
      - Not very important
      - Not at all important

   c) Family Relations and Unity
      - Very important
      - Somewhat important
      - Not very important
      - Not at all important

   d) Love for Children
      - Very important
e) Village Cooperation and Responsibility to Village
   ◊ Very important
   ◊ Somewhat important
   ◊ Not very important
   ◊ Not at all important

f) Humor; Honesty and Fairness
   ◊ Very important
   ◊ Somewhat important
   ◊ Not very important
   ◊ Not at all important

g) Sharing and Caring
   ◊ Very important
   ◊ Somewhat important
   ◊ Not very important
   ◊ Not at all important

h) Respect for Elders and Others
   ◊ Very important
   ◊ Somewhat important
   ◊ Not very important
   ◊ Not at all important

i) Respect for Knowledge & Wisdom from Life Experiences
   ◊ Very important
   ◊ Somewhat important
   ◊ Not very important
   ◊ Not at all important

j) Respect for the Land and Nature
   ◊ Very important
   ◊ Somewhat important
   ◊ Not very important
   ◊ Not at all important

k) Practice of Native Traditions
   ◊ Very important
   ◊ Somewhat important
   ◊ Not very important
   ◊ Not at all important
Not at all important

l) Honoring Ancestors
  † Very important
  † Somewhat important
  † Not very important
  † Not at all important

m) Spirituality
  † Very important
  † Somewhat important
  † Not very important
  † Not at all important

**School/Educational Information**

Next, I have a few questions about school and your parents’ educational backgrounds.

60) What grade are you in right now?_______________________________

61) How long have you been attending this school?___________________

62) What schools did you attend before that? Where? For how long? ______

63) What is your mom’s educational background?
  † less than 7th grade
  † Junior high school
  † 10th or 11th grade
  † High school graduate
  † Some college or special training (e.g., AA degree or vocational)_________
  † College degree in___________________________________________________
  † Graduate degree or training in_________________________________________

64) What is your dad’s educational background?
  † less than 7th grade
  † Junior high school
  † 10th or 11th grade
  † High school graduate
  † Some college or special training (e.g., AA degree or vocational) in_______
  † College degree in___________________________________________________
  † Graduate degree or training in_________________________________________

65) If other adults in house or not living with parents, what is their educational background?
Name:__________________________________________

Junior high school

10th or 11th grade

High school graduate

Some college or special training (e.g., AA degree or vocational) in________

College degree in_____________________________________

Graduate degree or training in_____________________________________

66) Have you or anyone else in your family ever attended a boarding school?

67) Has anyone in your family ever attended college?

68) Has anyone in your family ever attended graduate or professional school (e.g., law, medicine, social work, etc.)?

Activities Information

69) What are some of your favorite hobbies or interests? How often do you do these things?

70) What are your least favorite things to do? How often do you do these things?

71) What types of activities do you do with your family? How often do you do these things?

72) How much time do you spend at home usually each day during the school year? During the summer?

73) How much time do you spend each day with your immediate family (mom, dad, sibs) when you are not sleeping or in school?

74) How much time do you spend each day with your extended family (chedas, chudas, aunties, uncles) when you are not sleeping or in school?

75) How much time do you spend each day with friends outside of school?

76) How much time do you spend each day alone when you are not sleeping?

77) Do you ever use a computer?

Yes Where: Home School (circle one)

No

78) Do you have a computer at home?
79) Do you have a personal email account?
   Yes
   No

80) Do you have a page on a social networking website (e.g., Facebook, My Space)?
   Yes Which one(s)? ________________________________
   No

81) Do you like to go on the internet?
   Yes What websites do you like to visit (e.g., Utube)? ________________
   No

82) How much time do you spend each day usually on the internet? ________________

83) Do you play video games?
   Yes What games do you like to play? ________________________________
   No

84) How much time each day do you usually spend playing video games?

85) Do you have a satellite TV at home?
   Yes What shows do you like to watch? ________________________________
   No

86) How much time do you usually spend watching TV or movies each day?

87) Do you like to be outside?

88) Do you like to be inside?

89) Do you prefer to be inside or outside in the summer?

90) Do you prefer to be inside or outside in the winter?

91) What sort of things do you like to do inside?

92) What sort of things do you like to do outside?

93) How much time on average do you spend outdoors each day during the school year? During the summer?

94) When you and your friends spend time together, what sort of things do you like to do?
95) Do you have a job or volunteer at all? What is it? How many hours each week do you spend at your job? If paid, how much are you paid?

96) Have you ever had a job or volunteered? What did you do? When? For how long?

97) How much time do you usually spend reading for fun each day? What sort of books or magazines do you like to read?

98) How much time do you usually spend working on homework each day?

99) How much time do you spend alone each day usually?

100) What types of subsistence activities (hunting, fishing, berry picking, getting wood) does your family do?

101) What types of subsistence activities do you take part in? Who do you usually do these activities with (mom/dad, sibs, cheda/chuda, aunts/uncles, cousins, others)?

102) What are your favorite subsistence activities?

103) What are your least favorite subsistence activities?

104) Daily time allocation exercise. Show youth a blank pie chart. Ask youth to draw lines that show how she/he spends a typical day (at home, at school, not at home or school). Ask her/him to describe each section (how time is spent, with whom, doing what).

**Miscellaneous**

105) If I quote you in my research paper, would made-up name would you like me to use?
APPENDIX C: DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS/A PRIORI THEMES\textsuperscript{57} AND ASSOCIATED LIFE DOMAINS\textsuperscript{58}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset/theme</th>
<th>Domain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Family support</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Positive family communication</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Other adult relationships</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Caring neighborhood/community</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Caring school climate</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Parent involvement in school</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Community values youth</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Youth given useful roles</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Youth volunteers in the community</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Safety</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Family boundaries</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. School boundaries</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Neighborhood/community boundaries</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Adult role models</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Positive peer influence</td>
<td>Friends</td>
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<td>16. High expectations</td>
<td>School</td>
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<td>17. Creative and cultural activities</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<td>18. Youth programs</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Religious community</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<td>20. Time at home</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<td>21. Achievement motivation</td>
<td>School</td>
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<td>22. School engagement</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Homework</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Bonding to school</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Reading for pleasure</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Caring</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Equality and social justice</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Integrity</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Honesty</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Responsibility</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>31. Restraint</td>
<td>Friends</td>
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</tbody>
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\textsuperscript{57} Developmental Assets (a priori themes) are from *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style* (Alaska ICE, 2004).

\textsuperscript{58} Each a priori theme was assigned to one of the six life domains based for the purpose of organizing the data analysis and interpretation. Assignments were made after the data collection (fieldwork) and done somewhat arbitrarily, although I tried to base these on my understanding at the time of contemporary Dena’ina culture and society, limited though it necessarily was.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset/theme</th>
<th>Domain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32. Planning and decision-making</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Cultural competence</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Resistance</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Peaceful conflict resolution</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Personal power</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Self-esteem</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Sense of purpose</td>
<td>Self</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Positive view of personal future</td>
<td>Self</td>
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APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

FAMILY

1. Tell me a little about your family. How would you describe your family?
   Probes: Close knit or not? Everyone participates in decision-making or some
   have more say? Feelings of togetherness and shared participation or everyone
   does their own thing?

2. How have things been going for you and your family lately?

3. How would you describe your relationships with your parents?
   Probe: Close to your parents? Siblings? Other family members?

4. How would you describe the rules in your family?
   Probe: Parents strict or lenient?
   Know what your parents expect from you most of the time? What?
   Parents closely monitor whereabouts?
   Consequences for breaking the rules?

5. What sorts of things does your family do together?
   Probe: What do you enjoy the most? The least? Why?

6. If you had a problem that you needed help with, who could you look to for support?
   Probe: Who has supported you in the past? How did they support you?

7. In general, how do you like to spend your “free-time”?
   Probe: Spend a lot of time with family?
   Similar interests as family?
   Choose to spend time at home? With friends or other relatives?

8. Families have strengths that help them deal with challenges sometimes. What are
   your family’s strengths? How does your family use its strengths to deal with
   challenges?
   Probe: Positive communication? Examples?
   Support each other? How?
   Help each other out? How? Physical support (e.g., food sharing, money,
   childcare)? Emotional support?

9. Families also have stresses or things that make life difficult at times. What stresses
   has your family had to deal with lately? How about in the past? How did your family
   deal with ________?
   Probe: Concerns for your family? For yourself?
10. How does your family influence how you think and feel about life?  
   Probe: Help you have a positive outlook or a negative one? How so?

11. Overall, how do you think your family influences your well-being?

12. Is there anything else about your family that you want to talk about? If yes, what?

SCHOOL

1. Let’s talk a little about school. In general, how do you feel about school?  
   Probe: Is school a mostly good or bad experience for you lately?  
   What do you like/not like about school?  
   What is important/unimportant about school?

2. How has school been going for you lately?  
   Probe: Are you mostly happy or mostly unhappy with school lately?  
   Do you feel that you are doing well or not so well in school?  
   How do you like the non-academic parts of school?

3. How about when you were younger, what was school like for you then? When you first started going to school? As you got older (middle school, high school)?  
   Probe: If different from now, when did it change?

4. Have you ever wanted to leave the village and go to school somewhere else? If yes, can you tell me more about that?  
   Probe: How would going to school in Anchorage be different than here?  
   Have you ever wanted to go to a boarding school? What do you think it would be like? Why would you consider it or not?  
   What about going to school in another village, would you like that or not?

5. Tell me about a really good school experience or experiences you’ve had. Who was there? What sort of things were you doing? What made it a good experience?

6. Tell me about a not so good school experience you’ve had. Who was there? What sort of things were you doing? What made it a not so good experience?

7. Are there things that you like about school outside of class (academics)? Like what?  
   Probe: Place for social contact with friends? Adults?  
   Recreational opportunities? Sport?  
   Provide a “safe haven” or alternative place to be when not at home?

8. How do the adults in your life influence how you feel or think about school?
Probe: Parents’ goals for your school achievement? Expect/want you to do well in school? Expect you to graduate? Go to college? Teachers’ goals for your school achievement? Expect/want you to do well in school? Expect you to graduate? Go to college?

9. Tell me a little about your parents’ involvement in your school life.
   Probe: Talk to teachers about how you are doing?
   Help with homework or provide other encouragement or support?
   Participate in the LSAC?
   Would you like them to be more active or less active or about the same in as they are now in your schooling? If not much, would you like them to be more involved?

10. Do you feel that your school is a caring place, a place where other people feel you are important?
    Probe: Teachers/staff care about you? Show interest in your life? How?
    Teachers/staff encourage you to do well? Help you overcome personal challenges or achieve academic goals? If yes, how? Examples?
    Know clearly what the rules and consequences are? Feels that they are reasonable?

11. When you think about school, how has your culture been a part of your school experience? How about other cultures?
    Probe: If school was a huge puzzle with a bunch of pieces, would your/other culture have been a part of that puzzle, or would it have been a separate puzzle altogether?

12. Can you think of a time when school has helped you to feel (or do) better in other parts of your life (home, friends, self, culture)? How so?

13. Can you think of a time when other parts of your life helped you to feel (or do) better in school? How so?

14. When school has been difficult or tough, like carrying a heavy load of wood, what has helped you carry the load? Examples? What made the load heavier? Examples?

15. Have you ever considered leaving school? What would make you want to leave? If you have already left school, how did you decide to leave?
    Probe: Is it important that you graduate or get your GED? Why or why not?
    Have you ever felt afraid of graduating? How so?
    Why are some kids in the village making it in school and others aren’t (e.g., motivators, resilience, family issues)?
What makes it hard to stay in school?

16. Who has helped you do better in school? How did they do it?

17. Is there anyone you look up to or want to be like, who you can turn to for support when school or other parts of your life are tough?
   Probe: How does your relationship with _____ support you in school? In other parts of your life? Can you think of anyone else?

18. What can adults do to make school better for kids in this village? How would this help?

19. What can kids do to make school better for kids in the village? How would this help?

20. Overall, how do you think school affects your well-being (sense of enjoyment in life)? The well-being of other kids in the village?

21. Can you think of anything important about school that we haven’t talked about? Are there other ways that school makes a difference in your life? If yes, what?

CULTURE

1. Let’s talk about culture for a few minutes. What is your culture? How would you describe it to someone who doesn’t know anything about it?

2. How is culture important (or not) in your life?
   Probe: How do you feel about being ____? Is it important to you that you are ____? A good experience or not so good experience? Why?
   How does being ____ influence your well-being? Examples?

3. What kind of things do you do that are about your culture?
   Probe: Do you ever go to Native events (e.g., AFN, youth-elder conferences, fiddling competitions, dance, Eskimo-Indian Olympics, subsistence)? Which ones? What do you do there? What do you like about these events? Not like? Do you think you will do these or other cultural things as an adult? Why or why not? Is it important to practice Native traditions? Why or why not? How?

4. How important is subsistence (living off the land) to you in your life right now? Why?
   Probe: Is subsistence important to your well-being or health as an individual? To the health or wellbeing of your family or community? How so?
5. In general, at this point in your life (not just this week or season), how do you take part in subsistence activities?
   Probe: What sort of things do you do? How do you feel about doing them (i.e., fun, not fun but necessary, important family time, etc.)? How did you learn to do these activities? Who do you do them with now? What are your favorite/least favorite subsistence activities? Why?

6. Do you think you will choose to live a subsistence lifestyle when you are an adult? How so? Why is this important to you (or not)?
   Probe: Will you teach your children (if you have them) to live a subsistence life? Why? What will you want them to learn?

7. What are the ways that you learn about your culture?
   Probe: At home? School? Community events? Extra-village events? Examples? Who teaches you? What sort of things do they teach you (e.g., history, language, arts and crafts)? Is your culture important at school? How so?

8. How would you describe your relationship with the Elders? How does your relationship with the Elders affect you or your outlook on life (what difference does it make in your life)?
   Probe: How have the Elders influenced the village? What is their role in the community? Influence on you as an individual? What is their role in your life? Examples? Feel that they care about you? Why or why not? Feel that they are role models? If yes, how so? Is there anything you would like to be different about your relationship with the Elders? How?

9. What do you think your relationship with the Elders will be like when you are an adult? Explain. How would you like your relationship with the Elders to be when you are an adult? What would make this possible, or help it to happen?

10. On the questionnaire (administered separately), I asked you about some traditional Athabascan values. In general, would you say that traditional Athabascan values are important to you or not so important? Why nor why not? If yes, how?
   Probe: Which Athabascan values are most important to you? Why? How? How do Athabascan values influence your everyday life? Your relationships with others? Examples?

11. What is your relationship to the land, what does the land or nature mean to you? Do you feel you have a special relationship with the land, or not so much?
   Probe: Do you like to be outside? Does it make a difference in your life? Why or why not? If yes, what do you like to do outside? Examples? How would you feel if you didn’t get to be outside? Why?
Do you feel that nature is special (needs to be protected) in any way? How so?

12. In general, how comfortable do you feel talking or doing things with non-Natives? Native people from other cultures or tribes? Examples? 
   Probe: Feel that you can relate to people from other cultures or backgrounds? What would make you feel more comfortable talking or doing things with people of other cultures? Examples?

13. In general, how comfortable do you feel talking or doing things Native people from your own culture or tribe? Examples?
   Probe: Feel that you can relate well to people from your own culture? Examples? What would make you feel more comfortable or knowledgeable about your own culture?

14. How important will your culture be to you when you are an adult? Why? Examples?
   Probe: Will you want to learn about your culture when you are an adult? Why or why not? Examples?
   If you have children, will you want to teach your children about your culture? Why or why not?

15. Speaking of the future, how well do you think you will get along in the Native world when you are an adult? How about in the non-Native world? Please explain.

16. Overall, how do you feel that your culture or the tribe affects your well-being? The well-being of other kids?

17. Can you think of anything important about how your culture matters in your life that we haven’t talked about? If yes, what? For other kids? How?

COMMUNITY

1. In general, how do you like living in the village?
   Probe: Would you describe the village as a good place to grow up? Why or why not?

2. How would you describe what it is like to live here?

3. What do you like about the village? Why?

4. What do you not like so much or wish were different about the village? Why?

5. Is the village a safe place for kids? Why or why not?
Probe: Do you usually feel safe in the village (free from threats of harm)? Why or why not?

6. How do kids in the village keep safe? Examples?

7. How do adults in the village feel about the kids here? Can you give me an example?
   Probe: Do adults in the village think kids are important or special? How can you tell?

8. How do adults in the village treat kids who live here? Can you give me an example?
   Probe: Do adults in the village care about (show love and support for) kids in the community? How can you tell?

9. Are there adults in the village other than your parents who look out for you, for your well-being? If yes, how do they do this?

10. Other than your parents, is there an adult in the community who you would ask for support or help if you needed it? Tell me a little about your relationship with that person. Are there others?

11. What sort of opportunities are there for kids in the village to work or volunteer?
   Probe: Have you participated in any of these? How so? How was that for you?
   Would you recommend it to other kids?
   If none, what sort of opportunities for work or volunteering would you like to see in the community?
   Are there things you like to do that would benefit the community?

12. Are there fun things for kids to do in the village? Such as?

13. Are there useful roles for kids in the village? Examples?
   Probe: Do you feel that there are opportunities for you to participate or make a positive difference in village life? How?

14. How does living in the village help you (or not) to achieve your goals for the future?
   Probe: If it does not do this, what needs to be different in the village to help you achieve your goals?

15. Thinking about the adults in the village, who, if anyone, do you look up to because you admire them or want to be like them someday? Why? Is there anyone else?
   Probe: What do you admire about that person?

16. What kinds of changes would make the village a good place to grow up now and in the future?
   Probe: What can schools do to make life better for kids in the village? How?
Families? The tribe? Individuals? The government? What is your role in this, if any?

17. Do you think you will live in the village when you are an adult? Why or why not?

18. Overall, how does living in the village affect your well-being or that of other kids? Why?

19. Can you think of anything important about how the village matters in your life or the lives of other kids that we haven’t talked about? If yes, what?

FRIENDS

1. Let’s talk about friends for a few minutes. What kind of things to you do with your friends?
   Probe: Activities at home (e.g., video games, email)? Away from home (e.g., hiking, hunting)?
   What are your favorite things to do with your friends? Why? Examples?
   Least favorite things? Why? Examples?

2. Do you feel like you have a lot of friends or not a lot of friends? Why?
   Probe: If not a lot, do you wish you had more friends? Why?
   Do you ever wish you had more/less friends? Why?

3. Would you say you have a diverse group of friends, or are they a lot alike?
   Probe: How are they diverse? How are they alike? Is having a diverse group of friends important to you or not? Why?
   Do your friends all live in the village? If no, where do they live? How do you keep in touch with them? How often do you see/talk to them?

4. Can you think of a time when a friend was there for you, provided you with support when you needed it? Tell me about it.
   Probe: Are your friends usually there for you when you need them, when you are having a problem or need someone to talk to? If yes, examples? If no, what do you think gets in the way of them being able to help you?

5. Can you think of a time when friends or peers tried to get you to do something you did not want to do or something you knew was dangerous? Examples? What did you do? If no, what do you think you would do if that ever happened to you?
   Probe: Can you think of a time when you resisted doing something your friends wanted you to do? Example? What was that like for you?
6. In general, would you describe yourself as someone who can make friends easily, or not? Why? Examples?

7. Would you say your friends have the same or different values than you? (Do you care about the same things in life?) How so? Examples?

8. In general, would you say that you and your friends have the same or different goals for the future? If yes, what sorts of goals do you share? If no how are your goals different?

9. How important are friends in your life? Very important, not very important somewhere in between? Why? Examples?

   Probe: If you drew a circle that represented your whole life, what portion of the circle would be taken up by your friends? How much is taken up by other parts of your life (family, school, culture, etc.)? Do the different parts conflict with each other or do they get along pretty well? Tell me more about that.


11. Can you think of anything important about friends or how they matter in your life that we haven’t talked about? If yes, what?

   SELF

1. Let’s talk about you for a few minutes, how you see yourself and how you think about the future. How would you describe yourself? In other words, what kind of person are you? What makes “you you”?

   Probe: What do you like/dislike about yourself? What do you like/dislike about these qualities/ skills/talents? How do they help make you who you are? Do others see you this way? Why or why not?

2. Would you say that you feel pretty good about yourself (like yourself) most of the time or not so much? Why or why not?

3. Who is/are the most important person/people in your life right now? Why?

4. If you needed help with a problem or something that was weighing you down, who if anyone would you turn to for help?

   Probe: Why would you turn to this person? How would they help you? Is there anyone else?
5. How would you finish this sentence: “The kind of person I want to be is...”? What other (additional) answers, if any, would you give to that question? Why? Would you say you are that kind of person now? How so, if yes? If no, how can you become that sort of person?
   Probe: Moral identity (e.g., someone who helps others)? Material identity (e.g., someone who has a big house)? Physical identity (e.g., someone who is pretty)?

6. In general, do you feel that you can control or influence many things that happen to you or not? If yes, how so? If not, who or what controls what happens in your life?
   Probe: Do you feel that you can control what will happen in your life in the future? If so, how? If not, who or what will control what happens in your life?

7. How do you get through the tough times in your life? Can you give me an example of a tough time in your life and how you dealt with it?
   Probe: Is there anything or anyone that helps you to overcome or get through the challenges?

8. Who would you consider to be a role model in your life right now? What makes this person a model for you (what do you like/admire about him)? Are there any others? Tell me about them.

9. How would you finish the sentence “The purpose of my life is...”?

10. When you think about your future, what do you think it will be like?
    Probe: Do you think you will have a good life? Why or why not? Tell me what you mean. Will it be hard to overcome problems or not? Why?

11. In general, do you consider yourself to be a goal-oriented person (do you have ideas or plans for what you want to have happen at some future time in your life)?

12. How would you finish the sentence “My biggest goal in life is...”? When do you want to reach this goal? How about after that in (5 yrs, 10 yrs, 20 yrs)?
    Probe: What other goals do you have for yourself in the future? How will you reach these goals? What will help you get there? What will you do to make sure that you reach your goals for the future?

13. Do you think you will graduate from high school? Why or why not?
    Probe: What will you do when you are no longer in school? Work? Type? Location? Seasonal or fulltime? School? Where? What for (course of study)?
14. Where would you like you live when you are out of school?
   Probe: Alaska/Outside? City/ village? Advantages/ disadvantages?
   If in village, do you expect to live here for rest of your lifetime?
   If not in village, will you return home? How often? What for? How do you think living in a city, like Anchorage, would be different than living in the village? Can you imagine any reasons why you would want to live in the city?

15. What kind of family life would you like to have when you are older?
   Probe: Marry or not marry? Why?
   Kids or no kids? Why? Will you raise them according to Dena’ina values and traditions? What does that mean to you? → subsistence, respect for Elders, respect for the land, language, values, customs. Why is this important to you (or not)? What kind of parent do you think you will be? → strict/l lenient; traditional values; non-traditional

16. Is it important to you to live close to your family when you are an adult? Why or why not?
   Probe: Parent? Siblings? Extended family?

17. Do you think you will live a subsistence lifestyle when you are older? Why or why not?
   Probe: Tell me a little about the kind of subsistence lifestyle you would like to live when you are older. → hunt, fish, berries, cut wood, trap, work/no work, village/city.
   Do you think you will live this way your whole life? Why?

18. Think for a minute about what it means to you to be a successful grownup. What do you think of?
   Probe: Skills, resources, traits/qualities, knowledge, behavior?
   What will help you to become a successful adult?
   What will make it more difficult or get in your way of becoming a successful adult?

19. Is being a successful adult different than being a healthy adult? How so? Why not?

20. If you could do or be anything in the world when you grow up, what would you do/be? What would you like about that?

21. If you could go anywhere in the world when you grow up, where would you go?
   What would you like about going there?
   Probe: Try to imagine your life 5 years from now. Is your life in the future better than it is now, worse, or the same? Why? How about in 10 or 15 years? In 20 or 30 years?
22. What, if anything, do you look forward to when you think about the future? Why?

23. What, if anything, do you not look forward to when you think about the future?

24. What do you think will be different about your life than now when you are an adult?

25. What will be the same about your life than now when you are an adult?
APPENDIX E: ASPIRATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant ID#: ____________
Date: ____________

I have some questions about what you want in the future, your goals for when you are an adult. The first part is not about whether you think these things will really happen or not. It is about what you want to happen. Remember, there are NO right or wrong answers. The important thing is what you think or feel right now. For each question I ask, tell me if you:

Agree a lot / Agree a little / Disagree a little / Disagree a lot

1. When I grow up, I want to live in this village.
2. When I grow up, I want to make a lot of money.
3. When I grow up, I want to hunt moose.*
4. When I grow up, I want to graduate from college.
5. When I grow up, I want to live in another village.
6. When I grow up, I want to subsistence fish for salmon in summer.*
7. When I grow up, I want to get married.
8. When I grow up, I want to have a part-time job.
9. When I grow up, I want to subsistence fish for salmon in summer.*
10. When I grow up, I want to speak the Dena’ina language.*
11. When I grow up, I want to have children.
12. When I grow up, I want to live in a large town or city.
13. When I grow up, I want to rent or own my own house.
14. When I grow up, I want to have a seasonal job.
15. When I grow up, I want to run a trap line.*
16. When I grow up, I want to hunt caribou.*
17. When I grow up, I want to eat nivigi.*
18. When I grow up, I want to learn traditional ways from the Elders.*
19. When I grow up, I want to have a full-time job.
20. When I grow up, I want to avoid drinking alcohol.
21. When I grow up, I want to hunt ducks or other birds.*
22. When I grow up, I want to live in another village.
23. When I grow up, I want to pick berries.*
24. When I grow up, I want to work for an industry (mining, oil, or commercial fishing).
25. When I grow up, I want to have a smokehouse for drying fish.*
26. When I grow up, I want to live in a large town or city.
27. When I grow up, I want to be an active member of my tribe or other Native groups.*
28. When I grow up, I want to own a car or truck.
29. When I grow up, I want to ice fish in the winter.*
When I grow up, I want to live outside of Alaska.
When I grow up, I want to go to college.
When I grow up, I want to live in a small town or village.
When I grow up, I want to spend time with people who drink alcohol.
When I grow up, I want to live in the same village or city as my family.
When I grow up, I want to hunt bears.*
When I grow up, I want to sew skins.*
When I grow up, I want to work for a Native corporation.*
When I grow up, I want to have a year-round job.
When I grow up, I want to travel to other states or countries.
When I grow up, I want to own a snowmachine.
When I grow up, I want to eat mostly Native foods.*
When I grow up, I want to live in another state or country.
When I grow up, I want to drink alcohol.
When I grow up, I want to graduate from college.
When I grow up, I want to hunt beaver or other small game.*
When I grow up, I want to eat mostly non-Native foods.*
When I grow up, I want to live a subsistence lifestyle.*
When I grow up, I want to live in Anchorage or Fairbanks.
When I grow up, I want to join the military.
When I grow up, I want to live in Alaska.
When I grow up, I want to practice Native crafts like beading or wood carving.*
When I grow up, I want to be a wildland firefighter.
When I grow up, I want to spend a lot of time outside.
When I grow up, I want to eat dry fish.*
When I grow up, I want to eat both Native and non-Native foods.*
When I grow up, I want to own a steam bath.*
When I grow up, I want to have satellite television.
When I grow up, I want to become a respected Elder eventually.*
When I grow up, I want to own a computer.
When I grow up, I want to teach my children to live a subsistence lifestyle.*

You just told me about some of the things that you do or don’t want to happen when you are older. I would also like to know what you think will happen. I will repeat the things that you said you do want to happen (by saying “agree a lot” or “agree a little”). For each sentence I read, tell me how likely it is that each thing I read will happen when you are an adult. The important thing now is not what you want to happen, but what you think really will happen. For each statement I read, tell me if it is:

Very likely / Pretty likely / Pretty unlikely / Very unlikely
January 23, 2007

Nondalton Tribal Council
P.O. Box 49
Nondalton, AK 99640

Dear Nondalton Tribal Council Member:

I spoke with Council Members [redacted] and [redacted] in November, and they suggested I write a letter to the Council. I am writing today to formally request your permission to conduct research in Nondalton.

Some of you know me through my work with the Park Service. I am also a Ph.D. student in cultural anthropology at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. I spent four years in Ohio completing coursework and exams to prepare for completing a Ph.D. research project. In 2003, I moved to Alaska to continue my studies. Since then, I have worked for the National Park Service to support my academic goals, and I now work at Lake Clark National Park as an interpretive ranger. My work for the park has brought me to Nondalton several times to present programs at the Wellness Conference, visit the school and I attended Nondalton Culture Camp. However, my request today comes as a student not an employee of the park.

On my visits to Nondalton, I have been interested in the people’s concerns about youth wellbeing and the continuation of traditional Dena’ina values and practices. For my Ph.D. research, I would like to study Dena’ina youths’ orientations to traditional subsistence practices and the role of subsistence in their wellbeing. With your permission, I would like to complete the study in Nondalton. My research will address three sets of questions:

1. How do contemporary Dena’ina youth experience coming of age in the village? What are their expectations and goals for the future?
2. What are the orientations of contemporary youth to subsistence (living off the land) as a marker of traditional Athabascan values and practices? What does subsistence mean to youth today? How does it relate to their experiences of adolescence and their aspirations for the future?
3. What are culturally-appropriate measures of wellbeing for Dena’ina youth? What is the relationship of Dena’ina youths’ wellbeing to traditional subsistence practices?

To answer these questions, I would conduct a household census to determine the current number and ages of community residents. The census would include a community meeting to inform community members about the study and a door-to-door survey to ask the head of each household the names and ages of each household resident. The census is necessary to determine the names and number of youth
between the ages of 10 and 19 who would be eligible to participate in the study. Following the census, I would ask eligible members of the community to participate in the study. For the study, I would interview youth, parents and elders in the community on the topics of subsistence, wellbeing, future goals and stages of the life course. Youth participating in the study would be asked to keep a diary of hunting and fishing activities for one month during each season and a food diary for one week during each season. I would also like to observe and participate in subsistence activities and community events as appropriate and possible, such as summer and winter fishing and hunting camps, Culture Camp, school and church events, and community and family gatherings.

As part of the research project, I would also offer to teach a class on social science research methods to youth who participate in the study. Students in the class would learn about ethnographic research methods and techniques and would have an opportunity to complete their own ethnographic research projects. Each student would develop a research question about living off the land, interview an elder, write a report and present his research. As a student myself, I have benefited often from the teachings of other people. I consider it a professional responsibility to use my own training to support and build the capacity of young people who themselves may be social scientists doing research one day.

The collection of data for the research project would take about one year to complete. During that year, I would live in Nondalton for several periods of four to six weeks at a time and make other, shorter visits as well. Pending your permission, I would like to begin the research in late February or early March of this year if possible.

Participation in the study would be strictly voluntary and confidential. Data collected in the study will be kept in a locked file with only myself and my academic advisor in Ohio having access to the data. No identifying information for individuals that participate in the study will be included in the reports or publications resulting from the study. That is, any data collected from individuals will not be associated with their names or other information that could be specifically linked to that person or their household. Parental permission would be required for youth under age 18 to participate. Participants would have the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. The final report and any publications resulting from the study will be shared with the Nondalton Tribal Council and interested participants to review before submitting for publication. A copy of the final thesis and any subsequent publications that result from the study will be given to the community.

Thank you for considering my request to conduct my Ph.D. research study in Nondalton on Dena’ina youth wellbeing and subsistence. I am available to answer any questions by phone or email. (Phone: ; Email: ).

Sincerely,

Jennifer Shaw
Case Western Reserve University
March 13, 2007

To: Jennifer Shaw

The Nondalton Tribal Council would like to grant you permission to start your research, on the role in subsistence in the well-being of village youth here in Nondalton. If you have any questions or concerns you may contact the office here at one of the numbers above. Thank You and we look forward to seeing you here in the village of Nondalton!

Sincerely,

Administrator
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