

## Nunavut Inuit youth and leadership: Perspectives from the Northern Youth Abroad Program

## Jeunes Inuit du Nunavut et leadership: les perspectives du programme Northern Youth Abroad

Erin Aylward, Audrey R. Giles and Nadia Abu-Zahra

Volume 37, Number 2, 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1025715ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1025715ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Association Inuksiitiit Katimajit Inc.

Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

### ISSN

0701-1008 (print)

1708-5268 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Aylward, E., Giles, A. R. & Abu-Zahra, N. (2013). Nunavut Inuit youth and leadership: Perspectives from the Northern Youth Abroad Program.

*Études/Inuit/Studies*, 37(2), 161–179. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1025715ar>

### Article abstract

Northern Youth Abroad (NYA) is the first and presently the only educational travel program developed specifically to meet the needs of the Canadian North's youth. Part of NYA's mandate, cultivating northern youth leadership, has received very little academic attention and merits greater investigation. In this qualitative case study, we draw on semi-structured interviews with 10 Nunavut Inuit past participants, one NYA staff member, and one NYA Board member, as well as archival research at NYA. We argue that NYA alumni use both traditional Inuit and Euro-Canadian approaches to leadership development; as a result, these youths have created what Bhabha described as a "third space," where the binary dynamic between colonial/neo-colonial and traditional influences is displaced by new structures that weave heterogeneous influences together. These findings suggest that NYA's Nunavut Inuit alumni possess strong and adaptive leadership abilities. We conclude that in order to better understand the challenges that face the current generation of Inuit youths, researchers should be well advised to recognise the adaptability, resilience, and leadership that Nunavut Inuit youths such as NYA alumni have developed and use in a wide variety of areas of their lives.

# Nunavut Inuit youth and leadership: Perspectives from the Northern Youth Abroad Program

---

Erin Aylward\*, Audrey R. Giles\*\*, Nadia Abu-Zahra\*\*\*

**Résumé:** Jeunes Inuit du Nunavut et leadership: les perspectives du programme Northern Youth Abroad

Northern Youth Abroad (NYA) est le premier et, à l'heure actuelle, le seul programme de voyage pédagogique offert pour répondre aux besoins des jeunes du nord du Canada. Une partie du mandat de NYA est de cultiver le leadership des jeunes, domaine très peu étudié et qui mérite davantage d'attention. Dans cette étude de cas qualitative, nous utilisons des entretiens semi-structurés qui ont eu lieu avec 10 anciens participants inuit de NYA, un employé de NYA, et un membre du comité de NYA, ainsi que des documents d'archives de NYA. Pour développer du leadership, nous avançons que les anciens de NYA se servent d'approches traditionnelles inuit et euro-canadiennes, créant ainsi ce que Bhabha décrit comme un «troisième espace» où la dynamique binaire entre les influences coloniales/néo-coloniales et traditionnelles est remplacée par de nouvelles structures où s'entremêlent des influences hétérogènes. Nos résultats suggèrent que les anciens participants inuit de NYA venant du Nunavut ont de fortes aptitudes au leadership qui leur permettent de s'adapter. Enfin, pour pouvoir mieux comprendre les défis auxquels les jeunes Inuit d'aujourd'hui sont confrontés, les chercheurs devraient reconnaître l'adaptabilité, la résilience et le leadership des jeunes Inuit du Nunavut, aptitudes que les anciens de NYA ont développées et qu'ils utilisent dans une grande variété de domaines de la vie courante.

**Abstract:** Nunavut Inuit youth and leadership: Perspectives from the Northern Youth Abroad Program

Northern Youth Abroad (NYA) is the first and presently the only educational travel program developed specifically to meet the needs of the Canadian North's youth. Part of NYA's mandate, cultivating northern youth leadership, has received very little academic attention and merits greater investigation. In this qualitative case study, we draw on semi-structured interviews with 10 Nunavut Inuit past participants, one NYA staff member, and one NYA Board member, as well as archival research at NYA. We argue that NYA alumni use both traditional Inuit and Euro-

---

\* School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa. Mailing address: 28 Oxen Pond Road, St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador A1B 3J3, Canada. [erinaylwardottawa@gmail.com](mailto:erinaylwardottawa@gmail.com)

\*\* School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, 334 Montpetit, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5, Canada. [agiles@uottawa.ca](mailto:agiles@uottawa.ca)

\*\*\* School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa, 120 University, room 8020, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5, Canada. [nadia.abu-zahra@uottawa.ca](mailto:nadia.abu-zahra@uottawa.ca)

Canadian approaches to leadership development; as a result, these youths have created what Bhabha described as a “third space,” where the binary dynamic between colonial/neo-colonial and traditional influences is displaced by new structures that weave heterogeneous influences together. These findings suggest that NYA’s Nunavut Inuit alumni possess strong and adaptive leadership abilities. We conclude that in order to better understand the challenges that face the current generation of Inuit youths, researchers should be well advised to recognise the adaptability, resilience, and leadership that Nunavut Inuit youths such as NYA alumni have developed and use in a wide variety of areas of their lives.

---

## **Introduction**

A growing number of leadership roles and responsibilities are emerging for Inuit youth in Nunavut. These new opportunities include the creation of Nunavut’s government, the rapid expansion of the territory’s resource development sector, and the increasingly apparent effects of climate change. Curiously, there is a paucity of research on the topic of leadership and Nunavut Inuit youth. Further, the limited literature that deals with Inuit forms of leadership has emphasised the voices of elders or older community members (Lee 1996; Minor 1992; Pauktuutit 2007; Tompkins 2006). Consequently, youth perspectives remain poorly understood.

Our research seeks to fill this gap by assessing how some Inuit youth describe and develop leadership. To do so, we conducted our research with Northern Youth Abroad (NYA), the first and presently the only educational travel program developed specifically to meet the needs of youths from Nunavut and the Northwest Territories (NYA 2012a). In light of the considerable cultural, historical, and socio-demographic differences between and among youths from these two territories, our research has focused specifically on the perspectives of NYA’s Nunavut Inuit participants. NYA was founded in 1998 with the intention of “cultivating youth leadership, cross-cultural awareness, and international citizenship” (NYA 1999: 6 in Meyer 2002) in Nunavut, and later in the Northwest Territories (NWT). Each year, NYA’s regional volunteer selection committees select approximately 40 northern youths between the ages of 15 and 22 as participants in their Canadian program. Efforts are made to select youths from a diversity of lived experiences and regions, including individuals who are at risk of prematurely leaving school and those who have yet to travel outside their home community (NYA 2009).

During the Canadian program, pairs of youths from Nunavut and the NWT complete work placements in various communities throughout southern Canada from July to August. Participants also convene for an orientation and re-orientation near Ottawa, where the national office is located. Following successful completion, participants are eligible to apply for NYA’s international program, in which groups of six to eight participants complete a six-week, volunteer work placement in Botswana. In the seven months preceding and the one month following their program, participants

complete community-based research, writing assignments, self-assessments, and skill development activities with mentors in their home communities.

Drawing on archival research at the national office in Ottawa and semi-structured interviews with 12 past participants, one NYA staff member, and one NYA Board member, we argue that NYA's Nunavut Inuit alumni bring together traditional Inuit and Euro-Canadian leadership approaches in response to the present-day challenges, opportunities, and demands that they face as Inuit youth leaders. In doing so, they have created what Bhabha (1988) termed a “third space” in which the binary dynamic of colonial/neo-colonial and traditional influences is displaced by new structures that weave heterogeneous influences together.

In this article, we contribute to the broader literature on Inuit youth by illustrating the agency and adaptability of these alumni in occupying and occasionally disrupting the neo-colonial spaces that they confront as Nunavut Inuit youths. In doing so, we provide an in-depth, empirical case study of how Bhabha's (1988) concept of third space, a site that is neither colonial nor pre-colonial, can be created through educational travel. Finally, we highlight how the ability of a third space to transform broader structures of power can also be hampered by neo-colonial structures in NYA and in present-day Nunavut.

## **Literature review**

There is a dearth of literature that addresses Nunavut Inuit youth perspectives on leadership. Given this paucity, we provide an overview of the literature on traditional Inuit styles of leadership. We also review studies on Nunavut Inuit youth, the majority of which highlight challenges that this demographic faces. Our literature review suggests that Inuit youth are excluded from discussions on Inuit leadership and Canadian youth leadership but feature prominently in the literature on Nunavut's societal challenges.

### ***Inuit leadership***

Despite significant gaps in understanding leadership from the perspective of Inuit youth, several studies have illustrated how traditional Inuit leadership styles differ considerably from mainstream, Euro-Canadian perspectives on leadership. In particular, the emphasis on individual achievements in Western styles of leadership contrasts with Inuit elders' emphasis on developing strengths and abilities that enhance the group's well-being (Hanson 2003; Minor 1992). This preference for collaborative skills rather than individualistic achievement has been linked with the strong value that Inuit communities have placed on group cohesion, equality, consensus, and sharing (Hanson 2003; Tompkins 2006).

Inuit leadership styles are embedded in a fluid and communal process whereby no single individual is characterised as the leader. For example, research on Inuit women's leadership on the Qikiqtani School Board dealt with the concept of *sivumuaqatiginniq*, an Inuktitut word meaning "to lead forward together" or "to lead as a team" (Lee 1996). In the national Inuit women's association's publication *The Inuit Way*, leadership is described as a temporal role dependent on context and broader group dynamics: "An experienced and respected hunter may be seen as a leader in certain situations or for certain tasks, but he leads more by example and by taking the initiative rather than delegating people to certain tasks. When the event is over, so is his leadership" (Pauktuutit 2006: 35).

The report's authors contrasted this approach with Eurocentric leadership styles that have been introduced through emerging political and employment opportunities in Nunavut. In particular, leadership positions in public, private, and non-profit sectors are premised on the assumption that a single person should occupy a leadership role for an extended time. Further, these leadership positions often require that Inuit exert authority over others, in contrast to the Inuit model of leading by example and non-interference (Pauktuutit 2006). Leadership positions that emphasise an individual's achievements and authority contrast sharply with feelings of *kanngu*, which Briggs (1970: 350) defined as including a wish to prevent others "from seeing [...] one's accomplishments (or lack of accomplishments)" and *ilira*, where Inuit "seem to blend unobtrusively into the social background [...] [which] may be partly due to a dislike of volatility and noise." Tompkins (2006: 81) asserted that these same tensions have contributed to Inuit under-representation in educational leadership positions, which are instead filled by *Qallunaat* ("white person" in Inuktitut) educators who can embody "appalling over-confidence, certainty, and arrogance."

Since the above-mentioned studies emphasised how elders, educators, and older community members view leadership, it is unclear whether Inuit youths perceive and develop leadership skills in a similar manner, especially in light of the current social issues they face. Indeed, research has documented how Inuit youth lifestyles and values have diverged considerably from those of previous Inuit generations (Cole 1981; Hanson 2003; ITK 2005; McDougall 1994; Targé 2008). Hence, while the basic values and assumptions underlying Euro-Canadian leadership styles are unlikely to vary dramatically between youth and the elderly, the same cannot be inferred for Inuit leadership. Below, we provide an overview of some of these emerging trends and challenges in order to better situate how Inuit youth might differently define or perceive leadership.

### ***Inuit youth***

While a growing corpus of literature has addressed some of the multiple and complex needs Inuit youth face, very few studies have assessed their assets, leadership, or well-being. This dearth of research was remarked upon and critiqued in a recent

report commissioned by the Nunavut Social Development Council and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.:

Most European and North American social reporting focuses solely on the failures of society—its deficiencies—e.g. school dropout rates, suicide, teen pregnancy, crime and lagging GDP growth. The usual social “report card” is a list of things lacking, it usually conveys the impression that the society in question is just a pile of problems. We believe that Inuit self-reliance and well-being is more than a matter of identifying deficiencies, it is even more important to identify assets and capacities—the good things, the reasons for being (Anielski and Pollock 2003: 8 in DCLEY 2003: 7).

These frustrations were echoed in the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre’s recent literature review of camp programs for Nunavummiut youth: “The literature overwhelmingly points to the glaring problems Inuit youth face but does not engage in scholarly discussion to explore what is working” (Noah 2010: 21). In light of these shortcomings, we provide an overview of the literature on the challenges that Inuit youth face. We conclude by re-asserting the need for strengths-focused research.

Numerous studies have highlighted how substance abuse, suicide, teen pregnancy, health problems, delinquency, and elevated school drop-out rates have become increasingly worrying issues (Hicks 1999; Ip 2007; Kral 2003). These concerns appear to be supported by a range of alarming statistics. The 2007 rate of youth accused of criminal offences was 4.4 times higher in Nunavut than in Canada as a whole (Dauvergne 2008); suicide rates among Inuit youth rank among the highest in the world and are more than 11 times higher than the overall Canadian rate (Kral 2003; Tester and Kulchyski 1994). Meanwhile, low levels of educational achievement have restricted many Inuit youth in their ability to pursue careers or other opportunities. For example, in 2001, 59% of Inuit aged 20 to 24 had not completed high school (O’Donnell and Tait 2003).

Nunavut Inuit youth presently encounter a range of serious social challenges, including high rates of suicide, substance abuse, and crime, among other worrying trends. An understanding their strengths, assets, and leadership styles could contribute to effective, relevant responses.

## **Theoretical framework**

Our research on how Inuit youth develop leadership draws on Bhabha’s (1988) post-colonial concepts of hybridity and third space. Hybridity refers to new sites that are opened as unequal cultural powers and discourses shift, mix, and weave together (Williams and Tanaka 2007). According to Bhabha (1988), “third space” refers to the conditions or processes that facilitate the creation of hybrid formations. Bhabha (1990) contended that communities and nations can transform cultural domination by enunciating new cultural demands, meanings, and strategies in this third space. In so doing, previously marginalised cultural groups recognise cultural differences within

their community and draw upon these differences to generate new or modified cultural identities. These new identities can fulfil a liberating role as they “displace the histories that constitute [them], and set up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (Bhabha in Rutherford 1990: 211).

The concepts of hybridity and third space provide tools through which to assess the perspectives of a southern-Canadian-founded organisation and to recognise the unique, cultural knowledge of Inuit youth. “Authentic” Inuit knowledge has typically been associated with older generations, and many youths have reported feeling excluded from this narrow conceptualisation of Inuit identity (Hanson 2003; Searles 2006). The concept of “third space” introduces the possibility that youth leadership styles can diverge from those of older community members as examples of adaptive reinventions rather than as a complete departure or betrayal of traditional identity.

## **Methods**

To assess how Inuit youth view leadership, we selected NYA, since this organisation’s staff strongly emphasised the strengths of Inuit youth and expressed great interest in our proposed research. In recognition of our responsibility to conduct relevant and culturally-sensitive research, we invited members of the Board of Directors to act—on a voluntary basis—as an advisory board; our Research Advisory Board subsequently consisted of two NYA alumni (one Dene, one Inuk), two educators (one Métis, one Euro-Canadian), and the Program Director (Euro-Canadian). The Research Advisory Board provided invaluable guidance on our criteria for participant selection, our interview schedules, and our analysis of the research findings through bi-monthly emails and conference calls.

Our research took the form of a qualitative, intrinsic case study, i.e. a qualitative investigation of a bounded system or unit for the simple purpose of understanding it better (Stake 2005). Hence, intrinsic case studies are not intended to explain abstract constructs or generic phenomenon, nor do they seek to build theory (*ibid.*). Instead, an intrinsic case study is undertaken with the explicit purpose of providing “thick description” (Geertz 1973) and a vivid portrayal of the case in question. Following consultations with our Research Advisory Board, we decided to limit our “case” to NYA’s Nunavut Inuit youth alumni from 2006 to 2011. This decision was rooted in our collective desire to provide an in-depth and contextualised exploration of leadership. Although the experiences of NYA’s participants from other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal backgrounds are important and worthy of further study, we felt that their backgrounds and experiences were too diverse for inclusion in this single case study.

Like many qualitative case study researchers, we utilised purposive sampling techniques in which the participants “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell 2007: 125). We recruited six male and four female alumni whose experiences, home communities,

years of participation, and personal development during and after the program reflected a balance of these elements. Our archival research complemented these interviews by drawing on a corpus of NYA documents written by alumni and international program group leaders from 2006 to 2011. While the experiences of NYA's Nunavut Inuit alumni formed the core of our research, we also interviewed the Program Director and a long-time board member for a richer contextualisation of these experiences.

The first author conducted all 12 interviews in 2012 in a semi-structured manner (Fontana and Frey 2005). Ten of the interviews were done over the phone; as a result, her ability to build rapport with participants and respond to non-verbal cues was more limited than during an in-person interview. To alleviate this limitation and to build a stronger relationship with NYA and their alumni, we also integrated participant observation, as the first author volunteered weekly at the national office in Ottawa. Participants received copies of their interview transcripts and were given the opportunity to revise them. We complemented the interviews and participant observation with archival research, which included an extensive review of Nunavut Inuit participants' feedback forms, reflection assignments, and responses to online alumni surveys from 2008 to the present.

We analysed our interview transcripts and archival research according to Miles and Huberman's (1994: 56) guidelines for qualitative thematic coding and with the help of the qualitative data analysis program NVivo 9. We adopted an iterative approach to coding in which we generated a start list of codes (e.g., "cultural identity," "confronting stereotypes," "definitions of leadership") and continually modified it in light of new information and categories that emerged from the data. Throughout this initial process of coding, we typed memos into NVivo 9 on the potential relationships that were emerging between codes (Glaser 1978). After reviewing these memos and re-reading the coded data, we generated an initial series of pattern codes (e.g., "cultural pride promotes leadership," "shyness inhibits leadership"). We then elaborated and tested these pattern codes by applying them and their counter-patterns (e.g., "shyness enhances leadership") to additional archival records and interview transcripts.

## **Results**

Our results highlight commonalities and differences between youths and elders in how they conceptualise leadership. Additionally, individual youths vary substantially in their conceptualisations. All alumni affirmed that they had developed as leaders in several regards, including development of enhanced communication skills, interpersonal competencies, personal growth, and a strengthened sense of cultural identity. Yet they also discussed some shortcomings when reflecting on their leadership development, such as difficulties in confronting shyness and in pursuing leadership development in their communities and social networks following NYA.



### *Descriptions of leadership*

We asked each interviewee to explain the concept of “leadership” to someone who had never heard the term. To understand whether these youths felt their leadership styles differed from those of elders, each interviewee was then asked to consider how elders might have answered the same question. In both cases, leadership was described as leading by example rather than as directing others. Youths also noted that leadership required interpersonal competencies like skills in communication and in following/respecting others’ leadership styles.

When youth described elder leadership styles, they centred on two predominant themes: “leading by doing” and “leading by knowing.” Elders lead by modeling important behaviours or skills, such as those related to hunting. For example, a 2009 (international) and 2007 (Canadian) NYA alumnus from Arctic Bay described elders as leaders because “they like to hunt more so they would try to teach us how to do this [...] they would let us do all the work [...] so we can learn it and they could teach us how to do it.” Interviewees also remarked that elder perceptions of leadership were rooted in acquiring and passing on knowledge. For example, an alumna noted that in Baker Lake, elders were valued for “knowing their environment and knowing who they’re working with.” Similarly, another participant noted that elders in his community of Whale Cove became role models “because of the way that they look at things and [...] because they have more experience.” Interviewee descriptions of how elders might define leadership were also fairly brief, possibly because youths felt uncomfortable or unable to speak about elder perceptions of leadership in fine detail. When we asked the Baker Lake alumna how an elder might describe the term leadership, she remarked that “I don’t know what they’d think—I wish I did.”

When youths described leadership, they often referred to “leading by doing” and non-interference—traits that the interviewees had also associated with elder leadership. In particular, interviewees frequently referenced “leading by example” as a foundational component of their leadership definitions. Some interviewees appeared to feel that defining leadership was challenging for this very reason—namely, that leadership could refer to virtually any scenario in which an individual modeled desirable behaviours or actions. For example, an alumna remarked: “I don’t know how to explain it [leadership]—like, taking part and taking action on things and being a leader—it’s kind of straightforward.” Several interviewees discussed the importance of enabling others to learn for themselves rather than directing or commanding others. Thus, an alumnus noted that “you don’t tell people what to do, they do their own things [...] it’s like teaching a man how to fish, not giving a fish, that’s [...] what I think of for leadership.”

Some interviewees also described “leading” with reference to its antonym, “following,” since this choice enabled others to lead. An alumna mused that leadership involves “following good decisions and making good choices.” Similarly, an alumnus remarked that leadership involves “guiding [a group] to a positive way or environment” and ensuring that “other groups get a chance to be in leadership.” According to these

interviewees, then, leadership is a dynamic process with distinct stages and responsibilities.

Interviewees defined leadership in ways that were not mentioned when discussing leadership by elders. In particular, they strongly emphasised effective communication skills. An alumnus remarked that leaders “talk more” as a way of building others’ motivations to become involved in different initiatives. In addition, an alumna included “communicating well [...] and with respect” in her description of leadership traits.

### *Developing leadership*

Through our analysis of the interview transcripts and the NYA archives, we found a range of ways in which NYA alumni reported having developed leadership. There were four predominant themes: communication skills, interpersonal competencies, personal growth, and cultural pride.

#### *Communication skills*

Interviewees vividly and frequently discussed enhanced communication skills when asked to reflect on whether or how they had developed as leaders through NYA. Further, almost all Nunavut alumni from 2006-2011 pointed to communication skills like public speaking, confidence in approaching strangers, or listening in response to the question, “what leadership skills do you have now?” on a post-program questionnaire (NYA 2011). The significance of communicating and overcoming shyness can be illustrated through the comments below from an alumna:

I was never good at presentations in school, so the program [NYA] helped me come out of [my] shell and not be shy and to take ownership and do what I want to do and not be so shy and awkward about it, like, being up in front of people or crowds—that was a problem for me ‘cause I felt kind of like, shy type. But after taking part of this program [...] I did presentation in front of people, I wasn’t so shy when I came home so I kind of broke out of [my] shell and took leadership more in the community, like, helping with the kids and taking up jobs that involved youth and impacting their lives and helping them make better choices.

In this brief passage, she frequently mentioned shyness, suggesting it had been a significant barrier to her development as a leader. An alumna from 2009 also described a direct relationship between communication skills and confidence as a leader:

I [...] am becoming more confident within [my] community towards raising our voice in a large group of people [...]. I do see [my]self as a leader because I will be helping youth [...]. I also want to let them know that there are many other positive things like traveling to do and all kinds of opportunities for which they can apply (NYA 2012c: 12).

Alumni also described how they enhanced their listening skills through NYA and thus became better leaders. After completing the international program in 2007, one

alumna reflected, “it is now easier for me to work with a group of people. [Before NYA,] I couldn’t do that. I used to try and do things our way, but [now] I give [my]self a chance to listen and speak” (NYA 2012c: 9). This alumna’s reflection also connects with the broader theme of developing interpersonal competencies as a leader, the second most predominant theme that alumni described when reflecting on leadership development.

### *Interpersonal competencies*

When NYA alumni described leadership development, they referred to interpersonal competencies that were varied and occasionally divergent. In particular, they sometimes mentioned interpersonal skills that appeared incompatible with the collaborative, example-setting approaches to leadership that they described. Hence, one alumna expressed confidence in becoming a “delegator, organizer, mediator, and spokesperson” (NYA 2012b: 3), while several others cited their ability to “take charge” of situations. In contrast, several interviewees described “giving orders” or being the one “in charge [...] the one to tell them to do this and this” as poor examples of leadership.

More frequently, alumni discussed learning how to respect and/or serve others. For example, one 2007 international program alumna reported learning that “if you set good examples, respect everyone and help people out, you can be a better leader” (NYA 2012c: 4). Another participant from 2008 reflected, “I respect the youth. I hope one day that I can be a better leader than now to show youth that we get stronger with positive energy/thinking and working together” (NYA 2012c: 13). Similarly, an alumna mused that some of NYA’s strongest leaders were those who helped others feel at ease rather than those who exemplified confidence in directing or delegating tasks to others:

there are some participants who are very quiet [...] but grounded or mature [...] in that way they’re being leaders, they’re like, calming the group down [...] you’re comfortable approaching them and asking them a question that you’d probably be too shy to ask someone else—and in that way they’re leaders.

These examples highlight the variability in the interpersonal skills that NYA participants developed and the different impacts that these skills have had on former participants’ leadership styles. Many alumni emphasised showing respect and service to others and thus enabling others to develop. A smaller number discussed developing more authoritative interpersonal skills, which could be likened to a more directive, Euro-Canadian style of leading.

### *Personal growth*

When alumni described leadership, another thematic focus was individual growth in developing confidence, a positive outlook, and/or a healthy lifestyle. One alumnus reflected, “I see [my]self as a positive leader after the program [...] before [NYA] I had a negative attitude—I used to drink a lot, get into fights, but now I’ve changed” (NYA

2012c: 8). According to this alumnus, then, taking control of one's life can be considered an important example of leadership. A Canadian phase alumnus shared a similar perspective when the first author asked him if he felt that he had grown as a leader since completing NYA. Following this question, he described how much of his adolescence had been consumed by activities like sniffing glue and drinking nail polish remover or hairspray. Derrick then asserted that he had become a leader following NYA because he had stopped participating in these negative pursuits. His description of leadership was therefore centred on his own remarkable journey of battling and overcoming personal challenges. These examples suggest that leadership does not have to involve directly influencing others, but can instead be rooted in one's personal growth and development.

### *Cultural identity*

Many alumni described a growth in cultural pride or awareness as a component of the leadership they had developed through NYA. One participant asserted that she had “definitely” developed a sense of leadership because she had gained “a sense of accomplishment and acceptance of [her] culture.” Another one shared that he had developed leadership skills in the NYA's Canadian program because he “got to show some of the kids how to drum dance [...] how it's done [...] and how we moved.” Similarly, a 2006-2007 NYA alumna reflected that “I have gained leadership skills—I overcame our shyness, I learned to be more proud of [my] identity ” (NYA 2012b: 4). In these and other examples, cultural identity was considered to be a noteworthy component of leadership development.

### *Barriers to NYA participants' leadership development*

In addition to the range of competencies that they reported developing as leaders, these youths also identified impediments to their ability to grow as leaders. Some discussed how they continued to experience shyness, which restricted their ability to lead. For example, an alumnus said that participants “who are quiet and shy like me” can struggle to exhibit leadership following NYA's Canadian program. Participants identified another potential limitation to alumni leadership development: the short-term nature of NYA's leadership programming. An alumna remarked that leadership development requires continual revision and practice “because, you know, we eventually forget some things.” The home environment also restricted or enhanced the capacity to develop as leaders following NYA. While most alumni felt pride and satisfaction in sharing their stories with other youths in their home communities, certain participants confronted bullying, unsupportive peer groups, and other inhibiting factors that restricted their capacity to lead (Rebecca Bisson, NYA Program Director, 2011). Finally, but perhaps most interestingly, an alumnus remarked that his community perceived youth as tomorrow's leaders rather than today's. As a result, youths were neither provided with leadership opportunities nor expected to take on significant leadership tasks in their society.

## Discussion

Our findings reinforce earlier research about the perceived divergence between Inuit youths and elders in cultural knowledge and values (Cole 1981; Hanson 2003; ITK 2005; McDougall 1994; Targé 2008). On the other hand, our results highlight similar ways in which Inuit youths and elders define and develop leadership. Throughout our analysis, we draw on the post-colonial concept of the “third space” (Bhabha 1988) to situate Inuit youth leadership development as neither traditionally Inuit nor *Qallunaat*.

### *Perceptions of leadership*

NYA alumni described elder leadership and their own styles of leadership as overlapping, yet distinct. In both scenarios, “leading by doing” emerged as an overarching theme throughout interviewee responses. The primary differences centred on *what* youths and elders were doing as leaders rather than on *how* they were leading. Much as Pauktuutit (2006) noted, interviewees described how elders would show leadership while hunting—a primarily male activity. Their comments nonetheless demonstrated a shift away from references to hunting for definitions of leadership and toward a broader and more gender-inclusive view. These findings support Hanson’s (2003) assertions about the range of leadership opportunities and changing gender roles reported by Inuit youths in their lifetimes.

Further, our findings show how Inuit youths emphasised communication skills and (occasionally) “taking charge,” in contrast to Inuit elders who preferred non-interference as a leadership strategy (Pauktuutit 2006). According to Bhabha (1987) and Kapoor (2008), we should not consider these youths’ altered interpretations of the term “leadership” as being “less Inuit” than the definitions put forward by earlier generations. Indeed, Kapoor (2008) cautioned that efforts to reproduce a “pure” Native identity reinforce the binary structures of signification that were imposed during colonialism. Instead of recreating the myth of a single, consistent, cultural identity, Bhabha (1987) recommended a strategy of cultural differentiation, whereby the heterogeneity of viewpoints and identities within cultures are recognised and celebrated. Hence, when these youths vary in the way they define leadership, they are not necessarily less Inuit than earlier generations, but rather differently Inuit. Indeed, their distinct leadership definitions might contribute to the loss of certain elements of traditional leadership styles; however, as we discuss below, these distinct interpretations can also enable them to better address their present-day social and political contexts.

### *Leadership development*

Alumni also described how they developed leadership abilities during their experience with NYA. In response to questions about leadership during interviews and

in archived questionnaires, alumni especially discussed development of communication skills, interpersonal competencies, a sense of cultural identity, and personal growth. These results highlight the remarkable capabilities of Inuit youths to assume diverse leadership roles, a theme that very little research has addressed to date. Indeed, the majority of reports and studies about Inuit youth have focused on the challenges that they face (Anielski and Pollock 2003 in DCLEY 2003), such as suicide, school drop-out rates, or substance abuse. While such issues are of course important and require scholarly attention, our findings reinforce Noah's (2010) call for more research on Inuit youth leadership as well. Indeed, our findings illustrate how some youths with addictions perceived themselves as exhibiting leadership by taking control of their lives, an important and inspiring counter-narrative to most discussions in research studies.

Our findings also emphasise the importance of cultural identity in enabling NYA participants to develop as leaders, a finding that is consistent with research that has illustrated how loss of cultural identity or ownership can contribute to low self-esteem, higher rates of suicide, and erosion of familial support networks (DCLEY 2003; Hanson 2003; Kral 2003; Searles 2006; Targé 2008). Significantly, our findings broaden the literature on cultural identity loss by illustrating how becoming proud of one's identity can generate valuable benefits; however, further research is required to assess the broader significance of strengthened cultural identity among Inuit youth.

Our results also illustrate the agency of youths in weaving Euro-Canadian and Inuit influences together to shape cross-cultural leadership styles. Many interviewees described their enhanced capacity to lead in terms of setting examples for others rather than in terms of wielding social influence, a preference that is consistent with the style of Inuit leadership discussed by Pauktuutit (2006). Alumni nonetheless discussed skills that had not been associated with traditional, Inuit forms of leadership. For example, *ilira* or "shyness" has been described as an important and common feeling in traditional Inuit society (Briggs 1970); however, the majority of NYA alumni referred to overcoming their shyness as one of the most significant components of their leadership development. We suggest that these results highlight how cultural variations in leadership are dynamic and continually re-constituted by new cultural agents (e.g., youth) according to their current social context. Although leadership skills for physical activities like hunting would have been paramount for earlier generations of Inuit, leadership opportunities for Inuit youths today take place in a range of venues with an increasingly varied range of actors and communication media. When NYA alumni stress interpersonal competencies and communication skills in their descriptions of leadership, they may be adapting to present-day opportunities rather than departing from "Inuit" leadership styles.

This interpretation of leadership development resembles Bhabha's (1988) description of a third space as a discursive site in which the binary dynamic of colonial/neo-colonial and traditional influences is displaced by new structures that weave together heterogeneous influences. A third space for Inuit leadership, then, would draw upon colonial influences and Inuit values/knowledge to generate hybrid

leadership styles that are neither purely Inuit nor purely *Qallunaat*, but “something else besides” (Bhabha 1988: 13). NYA alumni’s description of leadership weaves elements of traditional Inuit leadership (e.g., leading by example, promoting cultural identity) with Euro-Canadian leadership traits (e.g., “taking charge,” enhancing ones’ communication skills). Further, when some youths describe leadership as personal growth or as an overcoming of addictions, they illustrate new perspectives that are absent from conventional Euro-Canadian and Inuit ones. By enunciating this new space, they introduce “a split between the traditional, culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference —and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, and strategies in the political present” (Bhabha 1988: 19).

Yet, as Bhabha (1990) cautioned, youths may be constrained in their agency to define concepts within a cultural group if its members emphasise a unified, national-popular sentiment that harkens back to earlier cultural forms. Searles (2006) echoed this concern in stating that the Government of Nunavut’s recent emphasis on traditional Inuit values may marginalise and even alienate many young Inuit. This tension was also illustrated in our findings when a participant observed that youths in his community lack credibility as today’s leaders. An important direction for future research and policy will be to re-examine how local communities and researchers view Inuit youth leadership in this era of emerging pressures, opportunities, and influences.

Our findings also raise important questions about the gendered dimensions of leadership among Inuit youths. Earlier forms of Inuit leadership have been largely described in the context of hunting (e.g., Pauktuutit 2006), being thus more strongly associated with male gender roles. In contrast, NYA alumni described dimensions of leadership that were not explicitly connected to gender roles and that may consequently enable women to access more prominent leadership positions now than in earlier times. Certainly, increasingly visible examples of female leadership in Nunavut are evident in the prestigious political positions that Eva Aariak, Leona Aglukkaq, and Mary Simon hold as respectively Nunavut Premier, Canada’s Health Minister, and past President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national Inuit organisation. Although women have encountered some barriers to participation in areas like sports and politics (Giles 2002; Gombay 2000), their opportunities for empowerment seem to have increased during the lifetimes of the Inuit youths interviewed by Hanson (2003). Does this trend apply equally or conversely to young men?

## Conclusion

Nunavut Inuit participants from NYA defined and developed a third space for leadership. They emulated many components of traditional Inuit leadership styles, such as “leading by example” and enabling others to take the lead. Nonetheless, while interviewees gave examples of “traditional” Inuit leadership, their descriptions applied to a variety of different scenarios. Furthermore, they reported developing leadership

skills that had not been formally linked to Inuit leadership styles, such as interpersonal and communication skills. Their descriptions of leadership, however, did include strong emphasis on cultural pride and identity. Some of them also highlighted personal growth as primary forms of leadership development. These findings suggest strong and adaptive leadership abilities.

Although our work has included participatory elements, we, like most researchers, cannot claim to have nurtured an egalitarian relationship with our research participants or with NYA. Neither can we assert that our research illustrates the perspectives of any Inuit other than of those individuals whose reflections we document. Despite these shortcomings, we argue that our research contributes to the important and poorly understood theme of Nunavut Inuit youth leadership. With better understanding of the mechanisms through which Nunavut Inuit youths develop leadership, it will be possible to improve their outcomes in several areas of life. First, such research may hold important insights into problems like suicide, substance abuse, and crime, since some youth leaders have confronted and overcome these challenges personally. Second, over a longer time frame, such research may provide a more nuanced understanding of how these leadership skills and aspirations connect with the range of leadership roles that are emerging in Nunavut (e.g., parents, politicians, caregivers, businessmen/women, etc.). Third, the Government of Nunavut, Nunavut youth councils, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and others have established leadership programs specifically for Inuit youth (e.g., CIDA 2011; Hanson 2003; Noah 2010) with a view to assessing how Nunavut Inuit youth develop leadership skills in their own community, territory, or abroad. Such initiatives can consequently enrich and deepen our understanding of Inuit youth leadership styles.

Through their responses, NYA's Nunavut Inuit alumni highlight how rapid cultural changes and new social problems have affected their generation. More compellingly, they illustrate their capacity to adapt to new contexts by crafting leadership skills that are neither wholly Inuit nor Euro-Canadian but in a "third space" (Bhabha 1988). Researchers can better understand the challenges facing this generation by recognising its adaptability, resilience, and leadership.

## **Acknowledgments**

We wish to warmly thank Northern Youth Abroad's staff members, research advisory board, and alumni, who so graciously invested their time, stories, and wisdom. This research project was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).



## References

ANIELSKI, Mark and David POLLOCK

2003 *The State of Inuit Well-being in Nunavut 2001*, report prepared for the Nunavut Social Development Council and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Iqaluit.

BHABHA, Homi K.

1987 Interrogating identity, *Identity Documents*, 6: 5-11.

1988 The commitment to theory, *New Formations*, 5(1): 5-23.

1990 *Nation and Narration*, New York, Taylor and Francis.

BRIGGS, Jean L.

1970 *Never in anger: Portrait of an Eskimo family*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press

CIDA (CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY)

2011 August 19 *International Aboriginal youth internships initiative* (online at: <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/ACDI-CIDA.nsf/eng/ANN-126114515-MNC> ).

COLE, Sally C.

1982 *Bored in the Arctic: The modern experience of Inuit youth*, M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's.

DAUVERGNE, Mia

2008 *Crime statistics in Canada, 2007*, Ottawa, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

DCLEY (DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, LANGUAGE, ELDERS, AND YOUTH, GOVERNMENT OF NUNAVUT)

2003 *Youth identity development strategy*, Iqaluit, Department of Culture, Language, Elders, and Youth, Government of Nunavut.

FONTANA, Andrea and James H. FREY

2005 The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement, in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, Sage: 695-727.

GEERTZ, Clifford

1973 Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture, *Culture: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, 1: 173-196.

- GILES, Audrey R.  
2002 Sport Nunavut's gender equity policy: Reality, rhetoric, and relevance, *Canadian Woman Studies*, 21(3): 95-99.
- GLASER, Barney G.  
1978 *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*, Mill Valley, Sociology Press.
- GOMBAY, Nicole  
2000 The politics of culture: Gender parity in the legislative assembly of Nunavut, *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 24(1): 125-148.
- HANSON, Morley  
2003 *Inuit youth and ethnic identity change: The Nunavut Sivuniksavut experience*, M.A. thesis, University of Ottawa, Ottawa.
- HICKS, John  
1999 *The Nunavut land claim and the Nunavut Government: Political structures of self-government in Canada's Eastern Arctic*, Aldershot, Ashgate.
- IP, Janet  
2007 We don't live in igloos: Inuvik youth speak out, *Canadian Family Physician*, 53(5): 865-870.
- ITK (INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI)  
2005 *State of Inuit learning in Canada*, Ottawa: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (online at: <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/AbLKC/StateOfInuitLearning.pdf>).
- KAPOOR, Ilan  
2008 *The post-colonial politics of development*, London, Taylor and Francis.
- KRAL, Michael J.  
2003 *Unikkaartuit: Meanings of well-being, sadness, suicide, and change in two Inuit communities*, final report to the National Health Research and Development Programs, Ottawa, Health Canada.
- LEE, Cathy  
1996 *Sivumuaqatigiiniq- Leading together: Stories of Baffin Inuit women educational leaders*, M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, Victoria.
- McDOUGALL, Barbara  
1994 *Helping "the future" to gain its voice today: The double oppression of Inuit youth and the pressing need for youth organization*, discussion paper prepared for Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, Ottawa.

MEYER, Andrea E.

2002 *The Nunavut Youth Abroad program: A new NGO in Canada's newest territory*, M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, Toronto.

MILES, Matthew B. and Michael A. HUBERMAN

1994 *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*, Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

MINOR, Kit

1992 *Issumatuq: Learning from the traditional helping wisdom of the Canadian Inuit*, Halifax, Fernwood.

NOAH, Jennifer

2010 *Youth wellness and empowerment camps*, report prepared for Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, Iqaluit (online at: <http://www.qhrc.ca/apps/UPLOADS/fck/file/Youth%20Empowerment%20Camps%20Report.pdf>).

NORTHERN YOUTH ABROAD

1999 *Nunavut Youth Abroad Program Partnership Agreement (Draft)*, Ottawa, Northern Youth Abroad.

2009 *Team Cara final report*, Ottawa, Northern Youth Abroad, one file in the NYA Programming folder (International reports folder).

2011 *Participant pre/post program questionnaires*, Ottawa, Northern Youth Abroad, one file in the NYA Alumni folder (Alumni feedback folder).

2012a *Welcome to Northern Youth Abroad*, home page at web site (<http://www.nya.ca/>).

2012b *01 Answers to feedback forms: NYA Nunavut Inuit alumni from 2006-2011*, Ottawa, Northern Youth Abroad, one file in the NYA Alumni folder (Alumni feedback folder).

2012c *01 Reflective essays: NYA Nunavut Inuit alumni from 2006-2011*, Ottawa, Northern Youth Abroad, one file in the NYA Alumni folder (Alumni feedback folder).

O'DONNELL, Vivian and Heather TAIT

2003 *Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2001 - Initial findings: Well-being of the non-reserve Aboriginal Population*. Ottawa, Statistics Canada.

PAUKTUUTIT (INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA)

2006 *The Inuit Way: A Guide to Inuit Culture*, Ottawa, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (online at: [www.uqar.ca/files/boreas/inuitway\\_e.pdf](http://www.uqar.ca/files/boreas/inuitway_e.pdf)).

178/E. AYLWARD ET AL.

RUTHERFORD, Jonathan

- 1990      The third space: Interview with Homi Bhabha, in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London, Lawrence and Wishart: 207-221.

SEARLES, Edmund

- 2006      Anthropology in an era of Inuit empowerment, in Pamela Stern and Lisa Stevenson (eds), *Critical Inuit studies: An anthology of contemporary Arctic studies*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press: 89-101.

STAKE, Robert E.

- 2005      Case studies, in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, third edition, Thousand Oaks, Sage: 443-466.

TARGÉ, Anne-Pascale

- 2008      Perspectives inuit sur les savoirs oraux, in Pascal Visart de Bocarmé and Pierre Petit (eds), *Inuit Canada: Reflexive Approaches to Native Anthropological Research*, New York, Peter Lang: 151-166.

TESTER, Frank J. and Peter K. KULCHYSKI

- 1994      *Tammarniit (mistakes): Inuit relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939-63*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press.

TOMPKINS, Joanne A.

- 2006      *Critical and shared: Conceptions of Inuit educational leadership*, Ed.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto.

WILLIAMS, Lorna and Michele TANAKA

- 2007      Schalay'nung Sxwey'ga: Emerging cross-cultural pedagogy in the academy, *Educational Insights*, 11(3): 1-19.