

Executive Summary of the American Indian Formative Immersion Research To Support Brand Development For the Youth Media Campaign

In 2000, the U.S. Congress charged the Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with the task of planning, implementing, and evaluating a national Youth Media Campaign (YMC) to change children's health behavior. The objective of the YMC is to help youth develop lifetime habits that foster good health; these habits include appropriate behaviors relating to diet, physical activity, and avoidance of illicit drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. The CDC has the responsibility of designing and testing messages with various youth audiences, involving young people in campaign planning and implementation, using tactics employed by today's best youth marketers, and enlisting the involvement and support of parents and other role models.

Children aged 9 to 13 years, or tweens, constitute the youth audience particular to this report. The study necessarily extends its focus to parents and other adult influencers, thereby making its goal the articulation of the attitudes, motivations, and behaviors of tweens *and parents* with regard to physical and other positive activities.

In mid-November 2000, the CDC selected Aeffect, a strategic marketing and communications planning firm, to provide research and consulting services to facilitate the YMC. The Aeffect research consultants and communications strategists have expertise in assisting organizations by gathering insights from determined target markets and leveraging these insights into effective communications. In September 2001, the CDC chose Frankel as the general market agency for their mainstream YMC efforts.

Frankel in turn hired Portico Research to engage in an ethnographic study of mainstream tweens. This ethnographic study is called the core study in this report.

Inasmuch as the YMC will be a comprehensive nationwide effort, the CDC included several ethnic market segments to ensure the Campaign's overall success. In this context, in mid-September 2001, the CDC selected Garcia 360° to develop ethnic overlay research focused on the Hispanic/Latino and American Indian populations. Garcia 360° in turn subcontracted G&G Advertising, an American Indian firm from Albuquerque, to ensure that the American Indian population was represented in all marketing efforts.

In November 2001, Garcia 360° and G&G Advertising selected the Brain Group to develop the ethnic overlay research focused on the Hispanic/Latino and American Indian populations. The Brain Group's unique expertise in international youth markets qualified that organization to gain deep insight into the cultural and communication dynamics of US Hispanic/Latinos and American Indians. Together, the three firms are referred to herein as the "overlay team." Moreover, the overlay team contracted with InnerFocus for immersion interviews within the American Indian audience.

The primary objective of this research was to obtain the point of view of American Indian tweens, parents, and influencers with regard to health and to physical and prosocial activity. The participants consisted of American Indians from various economic strata, living in rural and urban environments. Consideration was given to speaking with members representative of multiple tribes to gain a broader insight; however, participants were not identified by tribe.

A total of 16 immersion in-depth interviews were conducted in Pierre, South Dakota, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. The research methodology consisted of one-on-

one and dyad videotaped interviews with prescreened participants. Some immersion interviews were conducted in the home because a comfortable, familiar environment is a critical factor in eliciting information on lifestyle, attitudes, motivations, behaviors, and predispositions. Interviews were also conducted in schools and at leisure sites. For both research teams (working in Pierre, South Dakota and in Albuquerque, New Mexico) the interview environment was important to maximize the information gained and thus for determining whether and how positive activities are integrated into these tweens' lives.

In Pierre, the following interviews were conducted: four one-on-one interviews with tweens aged 9–13 years (one active boy and girl, one inactive boy and girl); two one-on-one interviews with educators from a rural school; two one-on-one interviews with mothers of tweens (not related to the tweens interviewed).

In Albuquerque, the following interviews were conducted: four one-on-one interviews with tweens aged 9–10 years (one active boy and girl, one inactive boy and girl); two one-on-one interviews with educators from a middle school; two one-on-one interviews with caretakers or parents (not related to the tweens interviewed).

Key Findings

Poverty and inadequate resources continue to be among the biggest problems faced by many urban and rural American Indians. Numerous parents noted a high level of stress concerning economic, marital, and disease issues. Low self-esteem and conflicts with their cultural identity were also mentioned. The idea of fitness and “ideal” health seemed less urgent to them than meeting immediate needs.

“Their problems with growing up . . . [here] is a lack of everything, lack of jobs, lack of money, lack of entertainment, everything.”—Influencer

American Indian tweens showed tendencies to dream; however, they believe their dreams are limited given the economic constraints and lack of opportunities in their daily lives.

Parents in this population define health primarily as having enough to eat and avoiding harmful substances such as tobacco, drugs, and alcohol. Educators perceive much to be concerned about in “Indian Country,” including disease, bad nutrition, lack of physical activity, and substance abuse.

“Life is a struggle here, we get involved with alcohol, drugs, and that's to ease the pain.”—Influencer

Physical activity and group participation were seen as valuable by parents when presented as a way to help American Indian tweens “balance their life.” The concept of being balanced appeals to cultural priorities and is a potential communication strategy for promoting positive activity to the American Indian population.

“I guess I'm looking for life-time skills, not for just something for now for them to do, something to keep them healthy in the future.”—Influencer

American Indian culture, geography, and mistrust of government contribute to this population’s tendency to isolate themselves from messages they do not relate to or trust. This isolation magnifies the potential influence of unhealthy lifestyles.