

**The 'Mooring' of Rural Canada:
Youth Volunteerism in Fragile Communities**

by

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ABSTRACT

THE ‘MOORING’ OF RURAL CANADA: YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM IN FRAGILE COMMUNITIES

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Over the past several decades, rural Canada has found itself in the throes of a demographic crisis, having lost significant portions of its young population to urbanized centres. Rural population loss affects not only the life-trajectories of youth migrants themselves, but also the vitality of communities that harbour them. Sadly, research examining rural populations in Canada has tended to focus on economic disadvantage as the prime motivator for youth migration. Little attention has been granted to local social and relational processes which undoubtedly have had great effect on youths’ perceptions of their hometowns, and their sentiments regarding migration. This research is intended to draw attention to the ways that rural youth may be socially engaged, fostered and ultimately retained within their home communities, and will illustrate the ways in which community involvement, through the forums of 4-H and Junior Farmers clubs, may serve to ‘moor’ young people in rural areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Research Overview

Over the past several decades, rural Canada has found itself in the throes of a demographic crisis. Rural and agricultural areas have witnessed, and indeed continue to experience the overwhelming departure of much of their young population (Dupuy, Mayer, & Morissette, 2000). As the agriculture industry evolves towards corporate structures, and as manufacturers shift centres of production to urban areas, rural communities are experiencing socio-economic stagnation. Job loss and underemployment are commonplace, and rural youth must scatter outwards in search of post-secondary education and employment (Dupuy et al., 2000; Malatest & Associates, 2002; Winson, 2000). According to Statistics Canada, less than 25% of departing rural youth will return to their communities of origin within ten years of exit, and “at most 39% of individuals who left their rural community will have returned to a rural community within the province of origin ten years later” (Dupuy et al., 2000; Malatest & Associates, 2002). Rural population loss affects not only the life-trajectories of youth themselves, but also the vitality of the communities that harbour them. Shrinking population sizes, decreases in local economic activity, and the absence of a sustainable workforce are only the outward manifestations of a much deeper social problem.

Sadly, research examining rural populations in Canada has tended to focus on economic disadvantage as the prime motivator for youth migration. Little attention has been granted to the local social and relational processes which undoubtedly have had great effect on youths’ perceptions of their hometowns, as well as their sentiments with regards to migration. This research is intended to counter current academic trends, by drawing attention to the ways that

rural youth may be socially engaged, fostered and ultimately retained within their home communities.

In keeping with the tenets of Social Capital Theory, this study will illustrate the ways in which community involvement, through the forums of two youth volunteer organizations – 4-H Ontario and the Junior Farmers’ Association of Ontario - may serve to ‘moor’ young people in rural areas. In this regard, three research objectives will be addressed. Firstly, this study will explore the multi-faceted meanings that young people attribute to ‘rural’ identity. Secondly, inquiry will be conducted into the methods by which the 4-H and Junior Farmers organizations serve to increase social capital through intergenerational communication, collaboration, and the creation of shared goals and identities. Lastly, this study will explore the impact of volunteering on rural youths’ sense of belonging within the community, and on their plans for the future.

This research is intended not only for the academic audience interested in rural and youth studies, but also for the social and political leaders of Canada’s rural areas. It is hoped that this study will reaffirm for youth volunteers and rural communities alike, that they may undoubtedly have great impact on the social landscape in which they live. Further, it is intended that this work will provide volunteer offices and organizations, as well as local government bodies, with further incentive and reinforcement to pursue funding opportunities for community revitalization and youth volunteer projects.

Thesis Outline

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Chapter One is comprised of two sections which are, admittedly, quite distinct. While their subject-matter differs significantly, each segment is fundamental to a comprehensive

understanding of the socio-cultural context of this study. The first section summarily features the two rural youth organizations which provide the primary setting for this research - specifically 4-H Ontario, and the Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario. Both of these organizations share long and storied histories within the social landscape of rural Canada. With roots that extend back to the turn of the 20th century, each has contributed immensely to the personal and social development of many thousands of young rural Ontarians (Biesenthal, 1981; Cormack, 1971; Lee, 1995). Unfortunately, in a society that is increasingly oriented towards urban culture and amenities, most Ontarians know little about these organizations and their vital role in our province's agricultural past and present. This section is intended to provide a brief background to 4-H Ontario and the Junior Farmers Association of Ontario, respectively; to acknowledge their beginnings, to detail their focus and mandate, and to introduce each within the context of this study.

The second section of this chapter strikes a more somber tone, detailing the economic and occupational realities of life in many rural Ontarian communities. While later segments of this study will focus primarily upon the *social* experience of rural life for young Ontarians, it is nonetheless indispensable to acknowledge the *fiscal* and *infrastructural* context in which these life-experiences are formed. This section will detail the modern challenges faced by rural business and industry within the province, as well as the incidence of job insecurity, reductions in spending, and outward youth migration which often result. It is surmised that such contextual discussion will be indispensable to the reader's apprehension of the final results of this study, and will lend significant insight into situational and emotional stressors that may be experienced by the rural youth of Ontario, as well as their families.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY & LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Two is intended to achieve several elementary aims. Appropriately, the first section stands as an introduction to the considerable body of literature which explicates and illuminates the lived experiences of rural youth in the western world. With this purpose in mind, discourse begins with an exploration of so-called ‘biographical’ studies of rural youth – those which emphasize the internal world of the young person, by highlighting common themes within youths’ descriptions of rural landscapes, and within accounts of their own personal identities. Subsequently, attention will be turned to those studies which attempt to explicate *how* youth construct these views and impressions, within the context of local social interaction. While academic research is somewhat lacking in this regard, insight will be gleaned from rural migration literature – that which explores how social cohesion and local relations uniquely affect rural youths’ life-satisfaction, community attachment, and future plans. As will be seen, three experiential domains have been found to contribute significantly and positively to the ‘mooring’ of youth within their communities of origin: ‘sense of community support’, ‘feelings of belonging’, and ‘level of social engagement’.

In the second section, a theoretical basis for the above-noted findings, as well as for the study to follow, will be considered. The tenets of the ‘Social Capital Theory’ will be discussed from an *embeddedness* perspective, in which local social networks, norms and value-systems are viewed as productive community resources. As will be discussed, social capital (by virtue of its ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ dimensions), is shown to promote trust, mutual obligation and communal identity – those interpersonal resources which have previously been identified as crucial to the local fostering of rural youth. Discussion will highlight how Social Capital Theory has been applied to the study of rural communities as well as voluntary organizations, and how

volunteer organizations may be seen as prime sources and indicators of social capital within rural areas. It is hypothesized that the social capital built and circulated within rural youth volunteer organizations (in this case, 4-H Ontario and the Junior Farmers of Ontario) should have a positive effect on the ‘mooring’ of rural young people. The greater the stock of social capital that is available within a given organization, the greater should be the internal ‘pull’ that the local organization and surrounding community exert upon youth. The chapter culminates with the establishment of five distinct criteria by which this hypothesis may be tested.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS & METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three, appropriately, will explicate the theoretical and practical methods by which the following research project was envisioned and undertaken. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying a ‘symbolic discourse’ approach to youth interaction, as well a brief overview of the ways in which this approach has informed subsequent questions for research. Consideration will be given to the relevance of qualitative methods (and in particular semi-structured interviews) for the purposes of this study, and a detailed account of the sampling, recruitment, and interview process will be provided. Fittingly, this chapter closes with a synopsis of the means by which interview data were organized and coded for later analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Chapter Four serves to introduce the reader to the dynamic personalities of the rural youth volunteers and club leaders who so kindly participated in this research. Opening with a revisitation of the study sample, this section will briefly summarize relevant data related to indicators such as gender, age, socio-economic status, and club-enrollment. Following the

directionality of the 'Theory & Literature Review', it will further delve into the unique world-views of rural Ontarian youth, by illuminating volunteers' perceptions of 'rurality' and rural identity. Consideration will be given to the manner in which youth respondents described the physicality of the rural landscape, the morality of rural-dwellers, and the social-physical criterion by which they located themselves as 'rural' persons. Following this exploratory discussion, attention will shift to the primary focus of the current research - to the formation of social capital within the forums of rural volunteer organizations. In specific, the latter part of this chapter will be devoted to the identification and evaluation of the overt 'bonding' and 'bridging' opportunities available within 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs. Relevant activities will be discussed in relation to three youth-centred 'spheres of interaction', namely: that of the youth-leader relationship (in the case of 4-H) and the youth-executive relationship (in the case of JF), that of local club meetings and activities, and that of provincial and national events.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In the closing phases of this study, social capital (as it presents within the interactional spheres of 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs) will be appraised for its influence upon the local 'mooring' of rural youth volunteers. Due to the intangible nature of this theoretical construct, evaluation will rely upon the five pre-established criterion by which social capital has been said to function, and by which it may be duly observed. Discourse will begin with an illustration of the diversity of youths' definitions of their 'communities of origin', and will provide representations of youths' impressions of local trust, reciprocity, and inter-generational understanding, as influenced by their volunteer experiences. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this chapter will close with an overview of volunteers' globalized sense of

‘belonging’ within rural communities, and with explications of their intentions for future rural residence and/or migration.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper will draw to a conclusion with a summarization of findings, with explication of the limitations of this study, and with the proposal of potential avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Introduction

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in spending, and outward youth migration which often result. It is surmised that such contextual discussion will be indispensable to the reader's apprehension of the final results of this study, and will lend significant insight into situational and emotional stressors that may be experienced by the rural youth of Ontario, as well as their families.

“For My Club, My Community, & My Country”: 4-H in Ontario

‘4-H Canada’, as it has officially been known since 1952, is the eventual product of a national rural volunteer movement which was conceived in the infancy of the last century. From 1910 through the 1920’s, what has become known as the ‘rural school movement’ laid the foundations for organized engagement of rural youth across the country (Lee, 1995, p. 117). In Ontario, individuals such as F.D. Hart, an O.A.C. graduate and representative for the Department of Agriculture, would organize the first provincially-recognized, agricultural ‘school fairs’ (Lee, 1995). Designed, “[t]o interest the school children in what is grown on or about the farm... [t]o encourage the betterment of quality in the produce... [and to] train pupils to enter into friendly competition”, these fairs provided an impetus for institutional instruction of youth in agricultural practices (Lee, 1995, p. 173). They also facilitated collaborative efforts between, “government officials, teachers, parents and pupils [who together] assured the success of the program” (Lee, 1995, p. 173). Indeed, “[b]y 1915, there were over 2,000 Ontario schools participating in the school fair program with the involvement of over 50,000 students. There were generally six or seven different classes at the fair ranging from livestock to fruit collection, from home garden plot products to essays and art” (Lee, 1995, p. 173). In continuance of this trend, locally-organized Boys & Girls’ Clubs began to be established across the country, the first of which is credited to the province of Manitoba in 1913. According to Cormack (1971), “[b]y 1924 the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs were firmly established in most provinces with a variety of supporters.

In some cases Departments of Education supported them, in others the Departments of Agriculture. Local authorities, Municipal Councils and Agricultural Societies were mostly called upon for donations to the prize lists, and many interested parents and friends contributed the necessary boost” (p. 13). These clubs, in general, “emphasized constructive competition as a means to the development of youth... [and] valued the development of skill and knowledge gained through project work” (Lee, 1995, p.181). ‘Agricultural Clubs’ promoted the proficiency of boys and girls alike, in raising livestock, cultivating grains and other crops, in managing forestry, and in the use of farm machinery (Lee, 1995, p. 181). Girls were also encouraged to participate in so-called ‘Homemaking Clubs’, which were largely supported by local Women’s Institutes. These clubs taught practical skills relating to gardening, food preservation, cooking, and needlecraft (Cormack, 1971; Lee, 1995).

With the founding of the ‘Canadian Council on Boys and Girls Clubs’ in 1933, an organization designed to centralize and coordinate the club work that was occurring across the country, the stage was set for the adoption of the 4-H ‘brand’ as it is known today (Lee, 1995). From the early days of the Council, “the idea was broached that the existing name, Canadian Council for Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, was not really appropriate. For one thing, it seemed too juvenile, and for another, it was too cumbersome. It also made no reference to agriculture... Discussions and arguments continued until 1952, when then present name of Canadian Council on 4-H Clubs was adopted and officially approved by the Secretary of State at Ottawa” (Cormack, 1971, p. 23).

As the seventeenth country to adopt the ‘4-H’ name for like-minded rural and youth-based programming, the Canadian Council also assumed, “the symbol and the official colours; green and white – green for agriculture and youth, white for purity” (Cormack, 1971, p. 23). The

4-H emblem, a four-leaf clover with an 'H' appearing in each of the leaves, is reflective of the Club's official pledge: *'My Head to clearer thinking, My Heart to greater loyalty, My Hands to larger service, My Health to better living, For my club, my community and my country'*. The 4-H motto, *'Learn to Do By Doing'*, was also adopted, and continues to be regarded as, "one of the most important precepts in the 4-H program... a means rather than an end in itself" (4-H Canada, 2012; Cormack, 1971, p. 58).

The 1950's and 60's saw a 'marked increase' in enrollment, and in the number of clubs available to participants (Cormack, 1971, p. 34). Beyond the, "well-established subjects of livestock, grain crops, garden, food and clothing, members were now concerned with such diverse matters [as]... Rabbit, Horse, Honeybee... Weeds... Strawberry, Grape, Community, Conservation, Defence... Nursing, Farm Safety, Knitting, Woodworking, Automotive... Electricity... Junior Leadership and Economics" (Cormack, 1971, p. 34). These decades also saw a, "widening international side of the movement. More and more exchange trips came about, with a consequent broadening of vision in the attitude of the young people themselves, and in the scope of 4-H itself" (Cormack, 1971, p. 34). Perhaps most important during this time period was, "a very significant trend towards the more sophisticated and relevant areas of personal, cultural, educational and vocational development, social leadership training, and the profitable use of the ever-increasing amount of leisure" (Cormack, 1971, p. 43). The importance of any specific project was limited by leaders, "in favour of the development of the individual... The goal now was the creation of the best citizens: boys and girls skilled in the highest type of civic ability, boys and girls who would take a leading part in the world around them" (Cormack, 1971, p. 34).

The year 2015 is recognized as the 100th anniversary of 4-H in Canada, and the aforementioned aims and principles remain strong within the club to this day. The following excerpt, taken from Lee (1995), well-illustrates the basic activities of a modern 4-H club:

“The main purpose of the 4-H program is the personal development of rural youth. The main object of the 4-H member’s attention is the 4-H project. These two objectives complement each other. The project is the means whereby the local leader is able to engage the member in constructive and pleasurable learning activities. Each project culminates in an achievement program which involved a presentation related to the project. In the case of a 4-H calf club member, for instance, the 4-H calf might be the project, and the achievement day is usually held at the local fair where the member could show his or her calf in a competitive class. Depending on performance at the local level, members might qualify to compete at regional and provincial shows. Most clubs also have an awards event when members are given recognition for the completion of the project. The members who achieve special distinction are often presented with trophies, pins, prize moneys and other such valued sources of pride and honour...

Other popular activities of club members include fair displays, parade floats, field days, baseball games, conferences, debates, public speaking, judging competitions, picnics, bus trips, fun nights, inter-club meetings, special events, and much more” (Lee, 1995, p. 162).

As evidenced by the preceding passage, 4-H is dedicated to the maintenance of a ‘grass-roots’ philosophy, in which the, “core of 4-H activities happens at the ‘local’ or ‘club’ level” (4-H Ontario, 2011, p. 5). Neighbourhood leaders and youth members work together to select club topics and activities of interest, and may also submit ideas for new pilot projects. Under the guidance of their leaders, youth assume responsibility for many of the ‘routine’ operations of the club. This includes the adoption of various executive positions (including President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Press Reporter, etc.), each with its own set of responsibilities and duties, as well as the administration of meetings according to a ‘Robert’s Rules of Order’ parliamentary style.

While sponsorship through OMAFRA, corporate donors, and individual benefactors is necessary to sustain the organization's not-for-profit mandate, the ultimate success of 4-H programs is indeed vested in adult, "[v]olunteers [who] work with Members to develop leadership and life skills that equip them with tools to reach their full potential and become conscious and contributing citizens" (4-H Ontario, 2011, p. 3). According to Lee (1995), "the 4-H leader has become the guardian of the program. The role of the local leader, coupled with parent interest and involvement... has created an unprecedented opportunity for 'ownership' and 'partnership' on a local level... [F]reedom, coupled with responsibility, will enable 4-H to continue its tradition of excellence" (p. 213).

The '4-H Canada Annual Report' (2012), further illustrates the administrative structure of the 4-H organization today. *Local 4-H Clubs*, "[t]ake direction from their provincial agency, conduct meetings and organize local activities. Club members participate in local, regional, provincial, and national 4-H programs and events" (p. 8). *Provincial 4-H Agencies*, in this case *4-H Ontario*, "[o]perate autonomously and are generally jointly coordinated by a provincial ministry and a Provincial 4-H Council. As a partnership they oversee the administration of 4-H in the provinces and operation of fundraising and other provincial and regional activities" (4-H Canada, 2012, p. 8). At the highest level, *4-H Canada* is comprised of, "the Canadian 4-H Council, the Canadian 4-H Foundation, and the national office staff... [The Council] ensures delivery of national programs and services consistent with the 4-H philosophy and enhancing provincial 4-H programs. The Foundation, governed by a volunteer board of trustees, manages assets of the [foundation] and raises funds" (4-H Canada, 2012, p. 8).

Nearly 26,000 young Canadians, aged 8-21, participated in 4-H projects during the 2011-2012 club year. Over 6000 of these youth were residents the province of Ontario, 3644 members

being female, and 2505 being male (4-H Canada, 2012). The average age of Ontarian 4-H'ers was 15 years, compared to a national average age of 13.5 years, and the average 'tenure' of Ontario members was 4 years. Ontario also reported a national high for the number of registered 4-H projects in that year (13,482 projects), followed by the province of Alberta (11,174 projects). Club enrollment trailed significantly in each of the remaining provinces, with respective totals of 4,860 projects or less. Interestingly, the province of Ontario rated *below* Alberta in the total number of leaders available to youth (1728 versus 2242 leaders respectively), despite having a larger number of registered projects (4-H Canada, 2012).

The '4-H Ontario Annual Report' (2011) further noted that of Ontario's 6149 enrolled youth members, 49% resided on a 'farm', 35% of individuals were 'rural (non-farm)' dwellers, and 16% of members were considered 'urban'. This pattern of residence was somewhat similar to that of the volunteer leaders, of whom 53% resided 'on-farm', 15% were 'rural (non-farm)', 11% were 'urban', and 23% were 'unknown'. The report also detailed the top 10 projects within the province, as denoted by rates of youth enrollment. Top clubs, in descending order, included 'Dairy', 'Beef', 'Horse', 'Locally-Submitted' Projects, 'Sheep/Lamb', 'Veterinary', 'Sewing', 'Field Crops', 'Scrapbooking', and 'A Sporting Chance'. Of the locally-proposed projects, the top 5 subjects included, 'Pizza', 'Lawn Tractor Pulling', 'Paintball', 'Canoeing and Kayaking', and 'Dog Obedience'.

“Self Help & Community Betterment”: The Junior Farmers Association of Ontario

The Junior Farmers Association of Ontario is a rural institution which, like 4-H, traces its roots to the early 20th century. In the dawning decades of the 1900's, so-called 'short courses' emerged in this province, under the instruction of the former Department of Agriculture (now the

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs). These courses, in the format of condensed three-to-four week sessions, provided young men the opportunity to gain specialized and novel skills in agriculture, and encouraged young women to broaden their expertise in the field of home economics (Biesenthal, 1981; Lee, 1995). The first of these sessions were introduced in 1912 with great success, and by 1914, the Department of Agriculture was lauding the potential of these young farmers who, “would be enthusiastic promoters of better agriculture and persuasive allies in changing outmoded agricultural habits in their communities” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 5). This innovative and positive spirit took hold not only amongst the instructors, but amongst the pupils as well. From the outset, students began to discuss, “the possibility of continuing their education and friendships in informal meetings after the course had ended” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 5). Encouraged by the enthusiasm of the students, and with the support of District Representatives, the Department of Agriculture, “adopted a policy of encouraging graduates of the short courses to form local associations” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 5). It was as a result of this mandate that the early Junior Farmer clubs were assembled (Cormack, 1971; Lee, 1995).

The constitution of the burgeoning clubs advocated for progressive thinking within the agriculture industry. Movement away from traditional, self-sufficient mixed farming was encouraged, in favour of specialized production for an increasingly industrialized marketplace (Biesenthal, 1981). As a result, “[d]uring the first ten years Junior Farmers throughout the province focussed their attention and their club programs primarily on agricultural education, especially in the summer and mostly by conducting experiments and participating in competitions” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 11). Junior Women’s Institute clubs were also initiated in 1915, with most members being, “graduates of domestic science short courses... the members of

the Junior Institutes strove ‘to help young rural women acquire sound practices for greater home efficiency’ (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 16). At their core, “[b]oth organizations were committed to improving farm life, to preserving rural values, to developing rural leaders and to having fun” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 16).

According to Biesenthal (1981), “Junior Farmers had always played as hard as they worked... As with all rural organizations the social objectives of Junior Farmers were no less important than its educational goals... [O]pportunities for social recreation in most rural communities were few and far between. Those organized by Junior Farmers’ clubs needed no more justification than the sheer pleasure of being with friends who shared similar interests, similar values, the same lively and optimistic spirit, and the same irrepressible sense of fun” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 16). From the 1920’s through the 1940’s, the scope of activities undertaken by the Junior Farmers expanded. The young men and women of the clubs organized social activities not only for their own members, but for the entire community. Events such as picnics, skating parties, baseball games, galas, carnivals, and plays were popular festivities (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 18-19). The principle of ‘community improvement’ also began to assume ideological importance, providing a complement to the traditional tenets of ‘agricultural education’ and ‘organized recreation’ (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 25). The motto ‘*Self-Help and Community Betterment*’ was adopted by the club, to reflect this dual directive (Biesenthal, 1981).

Young people were encouraged to become rural ambassadors, both in their local communities and the ‘progressively’ urbanized world beyond. It was argued that, “[i]f Junior Farmers were to become ‘leaders in a better agriculture’, they had to know how to lead; how to address a public gathering comfortably and confidently; how to convince a Fall Fair board to sponsor a Junior Farmer exhibit; and how to persuade a roomful of sceptical farmers that alfalfa

was a better and, in the long run, more economical feed for their dairy herds” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 19). Inter-County Field Days, leadership conferences and training sessions, and the 1947 advent of the JF Leadership Camp,

“provided Junior Farmers with their first opportunity to congregate in large numbers... [Of] chief value was the sense it gave Junior Farmers that they belonged to a larger movement... [These] associations provided the only stage and forum for rural youth in Ontario. On the stage, whether performing a duet in a music festival or debating the pros and cons of marriage, young men and women discovered talents they didn’t know they had or were too bashful to pursue; in the forum provided by club and county meetings they developed confidence in their views and... to think, act and speak for themselves” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 21).

Inspired by such opportunities for independence and self-determinism, and with the knowledge that, “enthusiasm and inspiration, which was the lifeblood of the clubs, had to come from within, from their own members and their own leaders”, the club subsequently elected to reduce its dependency on Ministry Representatives (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 35). In consequence, the Junior Farmers’ Association of Ontario became self-governing in the year of 1948 (Biesenthal, 1981).

In the decades following this organizational shift, “the Association broadened its goals and its membership. More emphasis was placed on preparing the members for leadership roles in their communities and for life in general rather than simply life on the farm. New members who neither worked nor lived on farms but who still felt a commitment to the rural community brought variety and renewed interest to the clubs” (Biesenthal, 1981, p. 116). These ‘purposes and principles’ remain today, as the JFAO strives to provide, “opportunities for young people of all backgrounds, but especially those in rural Ontario, to take on the challenge of exploring their individual talents and potential to develop personally while being involved in improving their communities, networking, and having fun... Programs and opportunities provided by JFAO and its affiliated clubs help to develop in members a sense of social and environmental responsibility,

the ability to provide effective leadership, and an awareness of good citizenship within the community and the world around them... JFAO provides coordination and leadership to clubs and provides opportunities to network through a variety of inter-club competitions, activities, and exchanges. JFAO gives future leaders a voice in related organizations and the chance to become leaders of today and tomorrow while maintaining a connection with our roots” (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p. 3).

Subsequently, “[a]ny group of individuals may show their desire to become affiliated with JFAO by paying membership fees for each member (age 15-29 as of the first of January) and presenting a list of officers to JFAO” (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p.3). This condition allows for a diverse geographical range of clubs, from township-based to county-wide, to be established and maintained under the Junior Farmers’ direction. New and established clubs must, “conduct a continuing program of activity throughout the year”, and must meet specific membership requirements, including: “[To] complete at least one (1) community betterment project... [To] complete at least two of: i) a joint youth activity, ii) a conservation project, or iii) an agricultural education activity... [To] have at least one (1) event reported on by television, radio or print media... [To] have a meeting or part of a meeting on: i) the structure and purpose of JFAO, ii) effective meeting procedures... [And to] submit a copy of the official minutes for two (2) club meetings” (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p. 3).

A Junior Farmers’ affiliate club may consist of any number of general members, along with an executive committee which oversees the club operations. Members may be nominated to participate in one of several ‘standing committees’, which supervise local operations under directives such as: ‘*Alumni*’ (archives, reunions, mentorship), ‘*Members Programs*’ (recruitment, executive training, social recreation, communications workshops), ‘*Public*

Relations’ (marketing, advertising and promotion, media releases, publications), *Finance*’ (budget, financial transactions, accounts and investments), *Fundraising*’ (sponsor recruitment and retention, annual donors, bequests), *Travel & Hospitality*’ (outgoing and incoming exchange delegates, ambassadors’ banquets), or *Agricultural Awareness*’ (Century Farm signs, Young Farmers’ Forum, farm tours and agricultural education) (‘Structure of JFAO’, JFAO, 2013). In addition, each club may nominate representatives to liaise with related organizations such as 4-H Ontario and The Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Clubs and/or counties further elect an executive member to sit on the JFAO provincial Board of Directors, and to “assist with JFAO programs by promoting and organizing involvement within their own county” (‘Structure of JFAO’, JFAO, 2013, p. 1).

In 2012, there were a total of 27 such clubs across Ontario, with an overall membership of 469 individuals. Membership was relatively balanced by gender, with 52% of members being male, and 48% being female. The community efforts of these clubs was significant, and “JFAO members raised over \$55,000 for charity in 2012 while volunteering over 1950 club hours in their communities” (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p. 4). In addition to locally-focused events and fundraisers, such as barbeques, tractor pulls, roadside ‘clean-ups’, car-washes, and elementary school programs, the Junior Farmers also continued the traditions of many provincial initiatives. Favourites include: *Winter Games*’ – a weekend of organized sports competition and dancing; *March Conference*’ – “a weekend of leadership, networking, and recognition of those [members] who have shown outstanding community betterment locally as well as provincially... with a dynamic group of speakers, sessions, and facilitators who were there to help delegates contribute to their own communities and province” (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p. 8); *Leadership Camp*’ – where, “delegates learn about leadership,

co-operation, and the importance of body language”, through games, group activities, and social events (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p. 10); ‘*Autumn Profile*’ – promoting ‘friendly competition’ and agricultural awareness through judging events such as, “goats, dairy heifers, eggs, quiz and TMR”, and ‘fun activities’ such as, “pumpkin carving, charades, egg toss, excavator moving event... and three legged race” (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p. 13); ‘*Sing Swing*’ – an event hosting a “multitude of home-craft events”, with competitions in such topics as ‘instrumental & vocal music’, ‘dance’, ‘photography’, ‘baking’, and ‘arts & crafts’ (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p. 14-15); a charity golf tournament; and the sponsoring/hosting of exchange delegates to and from such regions as the United Kingdom, Tasmania, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Ireland (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013).

Challenge & Change in Rural Canada

Over the past several decades, rural Canada has found itself in the throes of a demographic crisis. While agrarian population loss has been a continual trend in this country since the first burgeons of European settlement, the social and economic decline of rural areas has now reached what many consider to be an alarming level. At the turn of the 20th century, rural dwellers accounted for a solid 63% of the total population of Canada. More than half of the citizens of this country lived, worked in, and supported the social livelihood and financial economy of rural areas (‘Population, urban and rural, by province and territory’, Statistics Canada, 2011). By 1931 this percentage had dropped to 46%, and by 1951 the ratio of population in rural Canada had plummeted by more than half, with a mere 38% of citizens left in rural locales. In the last sixty years this plight has only been further exacerbated – a paltry 19% of Canadians were listed as ‘rural dwellers’ in the 2011 Census (‘Population, urban and rural, by

province and territory’, Statistics Canada, 2011). According to a recent summative report published by Statistics Canada, “[t]his number has been relatively stable since 1991, while the population living outside of rural areas has been rising steadily. Consequently, the proportion of Canadians who live in rural areas has been dropping and in 2011 fell below 1 in 5” (‘Canada’s Rural Population Since 1851’, Statistics Canada, 2011, p. 1). Accordingly, “between 2006 and 2011, Canada’s rural population increased by 1.1%, compared to Canada’s overall growth rate of 5.9%” (‘Canada’s Rural Population Since 1851’, Statistics Canada, 2011, p. 1). Not surprisingly, the limited demographic growth which did occur in rural Canada during this period was generally observed in close proximity to metropolitan centres (Bollman, 2012).

Statistics for Ontario, a region historically more ‘urbanized’ than its provincial counterparts, reflect trends which follow and even exceed this national bearing. Reductions in the percentage of rural Ontarians have progressed from 57%, to 29%, to 14% in the years 1901, 1951, and 2011 respectively (‘Population, urban and rural, by province and territory’, Statistics Canada, 2011). The province remains a major draw for new immigrants to Canada, with more than half of the nation’s incomers settling within its borders; however, “84% of them settle in the Greater Toronto Area... only 4% of them settled in rural areas in 1997-2006” (JFAO for Policy Research, 2013, p. 1). Data from the 2006 ‘Census of Ontario’ affirms that each of the southern counties encompassed by the sample of this study (Oxford, Waterloo, Wellington, and Peel) host highly urban populations. The percentage of rural dwellers in each county was indeed listed at 32.9%, 6.5%, 23.2%, and 2.7% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2010).

Naturally, there are a multitude of socio-economic motivators behind the aforementioned demographic and cultural displacements. Continued technological advancement over the last fifty years, in combination with the increasing globalization of trade and the emergence of

multi-national agricultural corporations, has created a modern Canadian farm industry which is overwhelmingly dictated by external markets (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Howard, 2009). By necessity, the majority of agricultural producers must compete to sustain their livelihoods through practices of extensive land-use, mono-cropping, and the employment of expensive mechanized technologies (Vaarst, 2010). Unquestionably, this has done much to alter the economic climate of rural Canada as maximization of output, rather than maintenance of a 'way of life', has become the critical focus in most farming endeavours. Across North America, "the size of farms has increased at the same time that smaller family farms continue to go out of business" (Allen & Sachs, 2007, p. 6). Data obtained from the 2011 Canadian Census of Agriculture gives a cursory glimpse into such realities in the province of Ontario. In the past two decades, farms sizes in this region have consistently increased, from an average of 206 acres in 1996, to 244 acres in 2011; however, the number of farm operators has dropped from 96,940 to 74,840 individuals, and the number of recorded 'census farms' has accordingly declined from 67,520 to 51,950 (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture & Food, 2012). Unfortunately, the total number of farms with an availability of 'paid agricultural labour' was also markedly reduced, from 27,946 in 1996 to only 16,118 in 2011 (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture & Food, 2012).

At the same time, industrial manufacturers have shifted centres of production out of many small Ontario towns and rural areas, in favour of urban centers of business. Winson and Leach (2002) note that, "[l]ocal ownership and management was a key factor in the development of many... [rural] community economies" (p. 7). Unfortunately, following the economic recession of the 1980's, as well as the ratification of free-trade in the 1990's, "local facilities were taken over by national and ultimately multinational corporate entities" (Winson & Leach, 2002, p. 7).

The authors' evaluation of several manufacturing-dependent rural communities in the province revealed,

“a clear shift away from the stable work in unionized facilities that had provided earlier generations of workers with security and decent working conditions. In the 1990s workers confronted an economy in which their most readily available option was flexible work, at relatively low pay... Many people moved from semi-skilled industrial jobs into part-time jobs in restaurants, shops, and nursing homes, into unskilled factory work, into providing casual child care to neighbours, or selling vegetables in a sidewalk stall” (Winson & Leach, 2002, p. 116).

Thus, the researchers concluded that a significant number of workers in formerly manufacturing-dependent communities may be perpetually ‘under-employed’, with middle-range jobs disappearing in favour of part-time work with no benefits (Winson & Leach, 2002).

The Plight of Rural Canadian Youth

As a result of these and other similar shifts, many rural Canadian communities are experiencing socio-economic stagnation. The consequences of job insecurity, variable work schedules, and the loss of family farms, have challenged the financial viability of rural areas. Residents must increasingly scatter outwards in search of opportunities for higher education and employment (Dupuy et al., 2000; Malatest & Associates, 2002; Winson & Leach, 2002). Most significantly to this discussion, rural areas continue to experience the overwhelming departure of much of their young population (Dupuy, et al., 2000; Tremblay, 2001). In the 1990's, young people aged 15 to 29 accounted for, on average, 24.6% of the Canadian rural population (Dupuy et al., 2000); however, in the time since 1971, each of the provinces had displayed a steady loss of rural young people to urban centres (Tremblay, 2001).

This finding was most pronounced amongst youth aged 15 to 19, of whom 28-32% left rural communities between 1991 and 1996 (compared to only 15-18% of urban teens who

migrated out of non-rural areas in the same period). Rates of out-migration amongst rural youth aged 20-24 were shown to vary significantly by province, in relation to the national rural average of 25-32%. Within this subgroup, “outflow rates in rural areas [were] higher than those of urban areas in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia... outflow rates in rural areas [were] lower than these of urban areas in the Atlantic provinces” (Dupuy et al., 2000, p. 16). Ultimately, however, the propensity for out-migration appeared to decrease somewhat with age. Nationally, a lesser 18-22% of rural Canadian young adults aged 25-29 (versus 17-19% of urbanites) left their community during the period from 1991 to 1996 (Dupuy et al., 2000). The province of Ontario, specifically, experienced a loss of 29-36% of its rural teens (aged 15 to 19) to urban areas during the above noted period, as well as 28-36% of its 20-24 year-old rural cohort (Dupuy et al., 2000, p. 16). A loss of 20-24% of Ontarian young adults, aged 25-29, was also revealed. This represented a decrease in out-migration *vis-à-vis* younger age groups within the province; however, each age bracket within the Ontarian sample displayed migration rates well above the national average (Dupuy et al., 2000).

Perhaps most importantly, Dupuy et al. (2000) found that in Canada, “at most, 56% of rural youth aged 15-19 [were] in their original community ten years later. The corresponding percentages for individuals aged 20-24 and those aged 25-29 [were] 64% and 74%, respectively” (p. 23). Less than 25% of departed rural youth would return to their communities of origin within ten years of exit, and “at most 39% of individuals who left their rural community will have returned to a rural community within the province of origin ten years later” (Dupuy et al., 2000, p. 23). Not surprisingly then, youth then accounted for a somewhat higher percentage of the total urban dwellers in Canada in the 1990’s, at approximately 26.3% of the populous (Dupuy et al., 2000).

Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette's (2000) study also illuminates the career orientations and job prospects of rural youth in Canada. According to their findings, "[y]oung individuals living in rural areas are less educated than those living in urban areas. For instance, of all individuals aged 25-29 living rural areas, 31% had a postsecondary education in 1996, compared to 46% for those living in urban areas" (Dupuy, et al., 2000, p. 3). They inferred that,

"[o]ne reason for the lower level of education of rural youth is that the type of jobs available in rural areas may require lower skills than those required by jobs in urban areas... Unsurprisingly, young rural workers are more likely than their urban counterparts to be employed in agriculture and in forestry and mining, where natural resources are predominant" (Dupuy et al., 2000, p. 4).

It was further hypothesized that differences in educational attainment may also be related to financial considerations. Specifically the,

"pecuniary and non-pecuniary costs of pursuing post-secondary education – which is generally not available in rural areas – are likely to be higher in rural areas than in urban areas. If the benefits of going to a post-secondary institution are not sufficiently higher in rural areas, the proportion of individuals who will choose to go to a post-secondary institution will be lower" (Dupuy et al., 2000, p. 4).

For these reasons, rural young people may also be uniquely challenged by scarcity of work in their home communities. Winson and Leach (2002) note indeed that youths', "structural location in the labour market makes it extremely difficult for them to find a feasible solution to the problem of making a living" (Winson & Leach, 2002, p. 137). During their adolescent years, "[t]he erosion of summer employment opportunities for youth in small communities is one dimension of this. No summer jobs place youth at an even greater disadvantage *vis-à-vis* urban youth when it comes to furthering their education in the hope of securing stable work in the future" (Winson & Leach, 2002, p. 176). Closure of manufacturing plants and facilities may reduce, "summer opportunities for many students, making post-secondary education a more difficult option financially" (Winson & Leach, 2002, p. 140-141).

For those youth who elect to remain in rural areas after completion of high-school, and who wish to pursue permanent employment within local firms, additional challenges are posed. Many must accept short-term or casual employment over the span of their early working years, as they await the opening of increasingly scarce, though better-situated, jobs. Unfortunately for many young people, even if desired local positions are ultimately attained, the challenge and stress of low earnings, lack of benefits, and risk of imminent job change often remain (Winson & Leach, 2002). Not surprisingly then, Winson & Leach (2002) noted that, “[t]he mood among young people interviewed was, understandably, rather gloomy concerning the possibility of their being able to make a life in the community they had been raised in” (p. 141).

It should be noted here that young women, in particular, face unique challenges within the rural economy. As prefaced above, the types of jobs available within rural communities are very often stereotypically ‘feminine’. Women are often specifically recruited to fill such positions as bank teller, cashier, social service worker, or medical technician (Hall & Mogyorody, 2007; Winson & Leach, 2002). In addition, the gendered division of labour on the North American farm has proven to be remarkably stable over the past half century (Allen & Sachs, 2007). Martz and Brueckner’s (2003) study of Canadian farm families concluded that in the period from 1982 to 2002, women did become more active in the completion of ‘traditional’ farm tasks; however, the greatest task increases remained in the domain of care for farm animals, performing errands, and driving trucks (Martz & Brueckner, 2003). Most women surveyed were still responsible for the majority of housework conducted, and most made major contributions to the farm through financial management activities (Martz & Brueckner, 2003).

CHAPTER 2: THEORY & LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following chapter is intended to achieve several elementary aims. Appropriately, the first section stands as an introduction to the considerable body of literature which explicates and illuminates the lived experiences of rural youth in the western world. With this purpose in mind, discourse begins with an exploration of so-called ‘biographical’ studies of rural youth – those which emphasize the internal world of the young person, by highlighting common themes within youths’ descriptions of rural landscapes, and within accounts of their own personal identities. Subsequently, attention will be turned to those studies which attempt to explicate *how* youth construct these views and impressions, within the context of local social interaction. While academic research is somewhat lacking in this regard, insight will be gleaned from rural migration literature – that which explores how social cohesion and local relations uniquely affect rural youths’ life-satisfaction, community attachment, and future plans. As will be seen, three experiential domains have been found to contribute significantly and positively to the ‘mooring’ of youth within their communities of origin: ‘sense of community support’, ‘feelings of belonging’, and ‘level of social engagement’.

In the second section, a theoretical basis for the above-noted findings, as well as for the study to follow, will be considered. The tenets of the ‘Social Capital Theory’ will be discussed from an *embeddedness* perspective, in which local social networks, norms and value-systems are viewed as productive community resources. As will be discussed, social capital (by virtue of its ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ dimensions), is shown to promote trust, mutual obligation and communal identity – those interpersonal resources which have previously been identified as

crucial to the local fostering of rural youth. Discussion will highlight how Social Capital Theory has been applied to the study of rural communities as well as voluntary organizations, and how volunteer organizations may be seen as prime sources and indicators of social capital within rural areas. It is hypothesized that the social capital built and circulated within rural youth volunteer organizations (in this case, 4-H Ontario and the Junior Farmers of Ontario) should have a positive effect on the ‘mooring’ of rural young people. The greater the stock of social capital that is available within a given organization, the greater should be the internal ‘pull’ that the local organization and surrounding community exert upon youth. The chapter culminates with the establishment of five distinct criteria by which this hypothesis may be tested.

A Biography of Rural Youth: Exploring Local Identities

In keeping with the aims of this research, a review of relevant literature must necessarily commence with an exploration of the meaning of ‘rurality’ amongst youth in rural communities, and an examination of the ways in which youth constitute both a sense of identity, as well as a sense of community in rural areas (Lynch & Peyrot, 1992). Fortunately, interest in the biographical narratives and conventional, local understandings of rural youth has been increasing over the past decade. Academic analysis continues to strive towards the provision of, “an opportunity for rural adolescents themselves to say what is important to them – to express their own thoughts, feelings, needs, or values” (Hedlund, 1993, p. 150). Efforts are being made to illustrate the ways in which rural youth, “imagine, define and create discourses of the countryside, in particular how they envision both the place of the countryside and their place in the countryside” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 1). It is the purpose of the following section to summarize recent literature regarding the local identities of rural young people, and to highlight the ways in which youths’ rural ideals may be conceptualized within the home community.

Reflections of the Rural ‘Idyll’

Current academic discussion has consistently highlighted the ironies of the so-called ‘rural idyll’ within North American culture. This prevalent social conviction associates rurality with a somehow ‘simpler’ way of life, fondly reminiscent of an idealized small-town and agricultural past. In popular culture, this imagined portrayal of the ‘rural’ tends to centre on two distinct themes: pastoral representations of the physical landscape, as well as positive valuations of the social fabric of rural communities (Rye, 2006). According to Rye (2006),

[t]he rural is not described and defined solely by the concrete, or tangible, objective features of rural areas (e.g., landscape, settlement and occupational structures)... [but also] on the more abstract characteristics of social life that evolve in these areas, for example, traditionalism, dense social structures, a feeling of community, and so forth” (p. 410).

Imagined as a haven from the fast-paced and technologically advanced society of today, rural living is often presented as “sanctuary-like” (Eacott & Sonn, 2006, p. 199), free from urban pressures (Malatest & Associates, 2002), and “changeless, timeless and somehow anti-modern” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 9; Winson & Leach, 2002). Rural locales are said to be “closer to nature”, offering a cleaner and healthier way of life to residents (Eacott & Sonn, 2006, p. 199). Perhaps most importantly, rural communities are believed to be more pleasant than their urban counterparts, boasting friendlier, more generous, and more caring inhabitants (Leyshon, 2008). Indeed, “[t]he rural stands both as a significant imaginative space, connected with all kinds of cultural meanings... and as a material object of lifestyle desire” (Cloke, 2006, p. 18).

Studies exploring the local identities of rural youth have certainly uncovered indicators of the ‘rural idyll’ amongst participants. Undoubtedly, one of the most common reports from youth studies worldwide is an appreciation for the physical attributes of the home community. In an extensive telephone survey of nearly two thousand rural Canadian youth, completed for Statistics

Canada and the Canadian Rural Partnership, 83% of respondents indicated that a “clean environment” was a positive and defining feature of rural areas (Malatest & Associates, 2002). In Johan F. Rye’s (2006) study of over six hundred rural Norwegian students, “nature” was ranked first in a list of descriptive terms which were organized by youth to typify rural characteristics. Leyshon (2008) also identified youths’ valuation of the countryside in various regions of rural Britain, citing frequent admiration for the ‘open’ and ‘unpolluted’ beauty of, “fields, woods, hedgerows, farms and lanes” (p. 9). He also notes agricultural land-use as a powerful identifier of rurality amongst participants, many of whom view local farming activities as the “preservative of a way of life” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 9).

Perhaps not surprisingly, youth also employ the ‘rural idyll’ in defining aspects of their individual identities. A 2008 study by Leyshon demonstrates that, “young people and social groups are constantly engaged in efforts to territorialise, to claim spaces, to include some and exclude others from particular areas” (p. 4). In this case, young people, “affirmed each other’s collective claim to ruralness and legitimated their position within the village”, by defining the boundaries of individual ‘rurality’ according to specific temporal and spatial criteria (Leyshon, 2008, p.14). In particular,

“a distinctive rural way of life [was] linked to order, the past, a harmonious connection with the land, [and] an understanding of the ‘right’ way of behaving in the countryside. Only through knowledge and respect for all these factors could... an individual be considered rural... ‘[T]o be country’ was not about simply being in place or imagining an idyll but rather through the adoption of a moral code of behaviour” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 14).

In declaring themselves to be ‘respectful’, ‘decent’, and ‘honest’, these youth displayed an adherence to the perceived social traditions of the home community, and ascribed to themselves an active role in the continuity of those traditions (Leyshon, 2008). Further, the geography of the

rural landscape allowed youth to pursue what they esteem to be ‘independent’ and ‘healthy’ lifestyles, characterized by enjoyment of the outdoors and physical activity (Leyshon, 2008, p. 14). In following a “moral geography of the countryside”, young people may not only secure their sense of membership within the home community, but also sustain the ideals of the social group to which they strive to belong (Leyshon, 2008, p.22).

Interestingly, those personal qualities assumed by youth to define ‘rural’ individuals, are often most evident in juxtaposition with those established to define ‘urban’ individuals (Leyshon, 2008, p. 12). Indeed, rural youth across studies have been shown to construct, “an identity for their urban counterparts as different, inferior, and unsophisticated” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 18), by illustrating them as disrespectful and prone to deviant behaviour (Leyshon, 2008). Conceptions of urban dwellers as ‘greedy’, ‘selfish’, and ‘uncaring’ are common, and urban youth are often associated with activities such as alcohol and drug use, ‘cruising’ in cars, and petty crime (Gabriel, 2006; Leyshon, 2008; Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 12). Rural dwellers of all ages have expressed concern for the influx of ‘city-folk’ or ‘commuters’ into the local area; however, in these instances, Leyshon (2008) argues that the, “perceived threat to the countryside... [is] not from incomers *per se* but rather an attitude towards the countryside by some people living in villages and towns and potential urban encroachment in the future” (p. 17). In sum, “the imagined rural idyll of rural youth is, in a way, all about exclusivity, and hence, rural youth identify with each other through their collective rejection of an imagined other” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 12). When rural youth actively associate urbanity with “risks, anonymity and impersonal relations”, they conversely uphold the perceived transparency, accountability, and mutual care of their home communities (Haugen & Villa, 2006, p. 210).

Rural ‘idyllism’ has also been shown to extend somewhat to youths’ descriptions of local social interactions. The aforementioned studies by Leyshon (2008), Malatest & Associates (2002), and Rye (2006) each reveal youths’ valuation of ‘close-knit’ personal relations within their home communities, as well as resultant feelings of security and stability. Stated simply by one youth from Atlantic Canada, “[t]his place may not have everything a large city has, but it’s clean and the people are friendly” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 9). Eacott & Sonn (2006) report an echoing of these sentiments amongst rural Australian young adults, who felt a genuine sense of comfort, security, and protection within their places of origin. Hedlund (1993), following a series of in-depth interviews with rural American highschool students, notes that, “[k]nowing everyone, and even being related to many others in the community, is satisfying because of the personal connection one feels with other people... There is generally a feeling of safety (low crime) and security (it is easy to get help with anything)” (p. 152). Jones (1999) concurs, relating that, “[k]nowing each other leads... to ‘looking out for each other’... and some see this as a major function of a community” (p. 8).

Social Exclusion & Reflections of the ‘Rural Dull’

Unfortunately, widespread acceptance of the ‘rural idyll’ can betray many of the realities of rural life for young adults. Indeed,

“[a]t one level, the image of the rural kept by rural youth... is a familiar one. By and large they reproduce the idyllic version of the countryside as a place characterized by nature and a dense social structure... The idyllic aspects of rural life, however, co-exist with a more negative image of the countryside, the rural dull” (Rye, 2006, p. 419).

Rural communities are often described in over-generalized terms, by youth and elder generations alike, as sharing “traditional values of hard work and cooperation”, and as places where residents, “regard themselves as community citizens... and are convinced of the principles of

reciprocal support” (Boyd, Hayes, Wilson, & Bearsley-Smith, 2008, p. 190); however, closer investigation often exposes contradictions to these assumptions. In fact, “[n]arratives of the rural as ‘safe and good’, but also constraining and controlling, are perspectives which, although seemingly contradictory, exist side by side as equally true” (Haugen & Villa, 2006, p. 209).

While “life in a known community among family and friends” may offer security and a sense of continuity to young people, it is not uncommon for youth to experience social marginalization within rural areas (Corbett, 2005, p. 65). In Malatest & Associates’ (2002) study of Canadian rural youth, many focus group participants indicated not only feeling unwanted in their home communities, but also being labelled as troublemakers. These youth felt that older generations discriminated against them, were quick to blame teens for local mishaps, and in some cases, “felt like the community wished to forget they existed” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 19). Meek (2008) relates that, “young people are often constructed as anti-idyll; seen to introduce disquiet, crime, and immorality” into what is believed by the wider community to be an otherwise stable and peaceful environment (p. 124). Young people often cite their visible presence in public spaces as a cause of discomfort amongst older rural residents, who see ‘teenagers hanging around on the streets’ as a significant social concern (Mirrlees-Black, 1998, as cited in Meek, 2008, p. 125).

Despite their professed love of ‘wide open’ spaces, youth may actually experience great difficulty in securing locales away from adult gaze, in which to socialize, ‘hang out with friends’, and even pursue romantic relationships (Haugen & Villa, 2006; Leyshon, 2008; Meek, 2008). Indeed, the, “idea that rural space is a free open environment at the disposal of children and young people is rendered increasingly problematic in western societies as more and more open land is privatised, protected by fencing and signs threatening the application of trespass laws”

(Leyshon, 2008, p. 9). This problem is only exacerbated by a lack of social venues in rural areas, which are age-appropriate and available for the enjoyment of youth. Indeed, in Eacott & Sonn's (2006) study of young rural Australians, over half of interview participants reported "deficiency in facilities, entertainment and resources" as a "prominent downside" to rural living (p. 208). In Malatest & Associates' (2002) study, youth participants noted that a majority of public spaces were designated either for children or older adults, and expressed frustration at the fact that, "some of the facilities that would appeal to teenagers (e.g. skateboarding park, roller rink...) had generated counter-petitions from the community" (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 42). Meek (2008) similarly found that a majority of the social issues facing rural youth are related to, "impoverishment in the area of social facilities and recreation... A huge majority of responses related to a need for more things to do and somewhere to go... These facilities [were] currently available only at neighbouring towns served by unreliable, infrequent and expensive public transport" (p. 129).

In addition to spatially-imposed restrictions within the countryside, youth may also experience social restrictions stemming from the supposed 'benevolence' of rural social networks (Hedlund, 1993). Haugen & Villa (2006) note that, "[t]he feeling of security [in rural areas] is based on transparency and that 'everybody knows everybody' and everyone cares about what is going on in the community. At the same time, visibility facilitates negative informal social control, such as gossip and the spreading of rumours" (p. 210). While youth acknowledge that local 'chat' can be useful for keeping informed about current events, they also disclose concerns for the invasiveness of such local dialogue. Worry is expressed for the persistence of rumours and labelling, due to low population density and repeated interactions with the same individuals over time (Hedlund, 1993). Haugen and Villa (2006) also found that young women

are particularly impacted by the consequences of such 'idle talk'. Indeed, "[o]ne interesting finding was that girls were more concerned than boys with the limitation that rumour and gossip put upon rural life... 70% of the rural girls addressed gossip and the spreading of rumours as a negative aspect of rurality, compared with only 14% of the rural boys" (Haugen & Villa, 2006, p. 213). Amongst both male and female informants, "gossip was to a large extent regarded as a female activity. Further, women were regarded as more likely to be the victims of gossip... The girls told about their awareness of taking care to avoid risks to their reputation" (Haugen & Villa, 2006, p. 213). The authors reasoned that,

"the room for [social] manoeuvre tends to be more limited for young girls than for boys, as the same behaviour is evaluated differently... [T]here exists a particular version of femininity within rural society and a strong belief that a traditional construction of womanhood is more appropriate to rural society... Sanctions come into practice whenever the expected order of gender relations and the proper way of being women (or men) is challenged. To be 'talked about' is a potential threat for both women's and men's identity. In a traditional patriarchal gender perspective it is especially moral issues such as the number of partners, sex and drugs, which can harm a woman's reputation" (Haugen & Villa, 2006, p.213-214).

Not surprisingly then, young people may be at increased risk for chastisement if their identities, with regards to such identifiers as 'dress', 'leisure interests', or 'sexual orientation', appear to be at odds with those of the wider community. As rural areas are often extremely culturally homogeneous, individuals who represent ethnic minorities, those who pursue 'alternative lifestyles or family formations', or those who dress or speak in a manner unlike their peers, may be at particular risk for social isolation (Hedlund, 1993; Leyshon, 2008, p.18). Hedlund (1993) also notes the presence of, "deep-seated biases based on socioeconomic status and family history. Rural prejudices seem to persist over time because extended family enclaves tend to persist over generations" (p. 153). Jones (1999), in his study amongst youth in the Scottish Borders region, similarly discovered feelings of marginalization amongst young people

whose families were recent ‘incomers’ to the area. As these youth were considered less likely to represent the traditions of the community, they experienced greater social prejudice than youth whose families were residentially rooted over generations (Jones, 1999).

Beyond the Biographical: Insights from Migration Studies

Discussion thus far has centered on what may be considered exploratory, ‘biographical’ studies of youth in rural communities – those which emphasize the, “internal world of the rural young person” (Hedlund, 1993, p. 151), by highlighting common themes within youths’ descriptions of rural landscapes, and within accounts of their personal identities. It is evident that a multiplicity of impressions, both positive and negative, may combine to define ‘rural life’ for young people worldwide. It is also reasonable to infer that individual differences in perception must arise, as youth attempt to reconcile impressions of the ‘rural’ which are, by their very nature, at odds with one another. Neither will any two rural youth view the countryside in exactly the same manner, nor will they define their individual ‘rural’ identity in exactly the same way. This realization, by its very nature, suggests a new direction for research and for this literature review. As Rye (2006) has appropriately noted, “defining rurality as a subjective and socially constructed phenomenon, located in people’s minds, rather than as a material and objective reality, [requires efforts]... to explain what social constructions people hold” (p. 413).

In this regard, Leyshon (2008) stresses that, “rural youth’s identities are emergent depending on the social circumstances they experience... commonalities and differences between young people [emerge] through an ongoing process of emplacement: the daily cultural practices of participating in place in which young people are as much engaged as adults” (p. 22). Unfortunately, there has been little academic attention granted to just such local social and

relational processes, though they have undoubtedly had great continuing effect on rural youth's perceptions of their hometowns. What insight is available derives from current migration literature, which examines the overwhelming trend towards youth exodus from rural communities in recent decades. It is to this literature, and to the interactional nature of rural 'embeddedness', that this discussion now turns.

The 'Push-Pull' Model of Migration

Within existing research, rural youth migration is often framed within a structural, 'push-pull' socio-economic model. This model, in specific, is predicated on the idea that rural youth migrants are governed by disadvantage within their hometowns. Where 'push' forces inevitably drive young people out of small communities, 'pull' factors simultaneously draw them towards more populous locales. The 'push' from small towns is exemplified as a 'driving out' of youth who, faced with a lack of cultural and economic resources, are forced to seek valued cultural items such as post-secondary education and career opportunities elsewhere. In turn, urban centres are said to draw these same youth towards them, satisfying the outward search through offerings of expanded social, economic and cultural opportunities. This 'pull' of urban areas is often based on youths' expressed desire to establish independence, or to investigate and experiment with lifestyle changes (Pretty, Bramston, Patrick, & Pannach, 2006).

Key criticisms have emerged, however, which challenge this 'push-pull' explanation of the rural youth migration phenomenon. Through detailed case study of a rural community in Nova Scotia, Corbett (2005) concludes that,

“an analysis of the complex nuances of culture, human agency, and subjectivity must be incorporated into migration studies to gain a clearer picture of the character of geographic mobility. Although structural push and pull mechanisms

are clearly important, they are experienced in the context of culture, community, and family, influencing some people to move and others to stay” (p. 54).

Jones (1999), having completed interviews with youth in the rural Borders region of Scotland, further advocates this viewpoint, expressing that, “[a] particularly under-researched aspect of youth migration is the relationship between the young person and the home community in which they live... One of the problems for migration research lies in explaining not why some people leave, but why some people stay” (p. 1-4).

Pretty and colleagues (2006) suggest an alternative to economically and structurally-based approaches to rural youth migration. Through a survey of over three thousand youth in the Darling Downs region of Australia, the researchers concluded that youth respond in unique ways to the structural and economic stressors in their communities. Indeed, many rural youth *do* depart from their small towns; however, the “experience of deciding to leave one’s community is not a singular consideration of going or staying but rather, one of being pushed and pulled in two directions simultaneously” (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 227). In specific, a sense of community support and feelings of local belonging were found to be positively related to youths’ intentions to stay in rural communities. In other words, rural communities exert a ‘pull’ of their own, influencing a young person’s sentiments towards their community of origin, and ultimately influencing the decision of whether or not to migrate. It is Pretty and colleagues’ recommendation that research on the life experiences of rural youth continue in the direction of “the socio-spatial context within which structural and individual difference factors are embedded”, and that it explore the impact of kinship, community, and neighbourhood relations on the propensity to migrate (Pretty et al, 2006, p. 228). Rather than relying exclusively on structurally or economically-driven ‘youth retention’ in social policy, it is suggested that researchers and law-makers should contribute to the social ‘mooring’ of youth in rural

communities. Positive experiences and perceptions of community should be reinforced in rural areas by supporting and promoting “those relational group dimensions that pull people to make decisions based on values of family, history, and culture” (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 228).

The ‘Mooring’ of Rural Youth

Although literature discussing the ‘mooring’ of youth within the context of rural Canada is scarce, many international studies have revealed that youth’s sentiments towards their communities of origin, as well as their feelings of social belonging, may have significant effects on their considerations for the future. In fact, three key themes emerge from rural migration literature, which implicate the relative ‘pull’ of the home community as a compelling determinant of the life-trajectories of young people. These themes are here represented as youths’ *‘sense of community support’*, *‘feelings of belonging’*, and *‘level of social engagement’*. As will be seen, these spheres of experience are highly interdependent - together they may significantly affect the degree to which youth feel drawn towards, or indeed ‘moored within’, their rural communities. Undoubtedly, the structural boundaries and economic conditions of rural communities have considerable influence upon the life-trajectories of young people - this reality cannot be disregarded; however, true to the mandate outlined above, the following discourse will focus on and emphasize the ways in which social cohesion and local relations uniquely affect rural youths’ life-satisfaction, community attachment, and future plans.

‘Sense of Community Support’

According to Pretty, Bramston, Patrick & Pannach (2006), a generalized *sense of community* is not merely, “inherent in rural town living simply because of small population size” (p. 228). The conclusion that, “‘smaller is better’ is a myth when it comes to the quality of [the]

rural community life of young people” (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 236). Instead, the relational experiences of rural youth are mediated by the ‘acquaintanceship density’ of the local area, and the degree to which fundamental social supports are available and offered (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 228). Essentially, an individual’s sense of community support is dependent on the presence of reciprocal social activity, and the opportunity for, “emotional bonding as well as the giving and receiving of assistance among community members” (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 229). It has broadly been demonstrated that, “[s]ocial attachments to people and places generally constrain migration and in this respect should favour adolescent preferences for settling near family and in their home community... These ties represent valued aspects of life that discourage [the] prospect of geographic separation” (Elder, King, & Conger, 1996, p. 400).

Pretty et al. (2006), in studying rural Australians aged thirteen to eighteen, indeed found that youths’ generalized ‘sense of community’, as defined by ‘perceived reciprocity’ and ‘emotional connectivity’, was positively related to their intentions to stay in rural communities (p. 229). Eacott & Sonn (2006), through study of adolescents in the Australian state of Victoria, also found that perceived ‘community support’ contributed to youths’ ‘moored’ feelings of local security and protection, and eased, “one of the most difficult developmental tasks adolescents face... acquiring the resources to fulfill their needs for intimacy, peer relationships and consensual validation” (Eacott & Sonn, 2006, p. 201). Elder, King, and Conger (1996), in longitudinal surveys of rural youth in the mid-western United States, likewise uncovered that one of the strongest socio-geographical ‘moorings’ amongst rural adolescents was the availability of a confidant amongst older kin and connections. Youth discussion led by the Canadian Rural Partnership in 2002 further emphasized the importance of inter-generational contact, with

community mentoring being, “mentioned repeatedly in the roundtable sessions as a method of maintaining attachments to rural youth” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p.33).

Interestingly, one study found that the ‘mooring’ effect of a perceived ‘sense of community’ amongst rural youth may change over time. Chipuer, Bramston and Pretty (2003) noted that the effect of ‘community variables’ on rural youths’ perceived quality of life actually decreased as they progressed through adolescence. The authors hypothesized that, “among pre-adolescents the neighbourhood and school environment may still provide an important context for their well being and development. In contrast, as youth age they become less interested in their neighbourhood... as their interests turn more towards their peers” (Chipuer et al., 2003, p. 92). These results corresponded with an earlier study by Chipuer et al. (1999), which found, “a steady decrease from early through late adolescence in youths’ perceived support from their neighbours and active involvement with their neighbours” (Chipuer et al., 2003, p. 92).

The youth participants of the Canadian Rural Partnership study also expressly valued the efforts of community members who invested in their well-being and helped to prepare them for the future, emphasizing that parents, teachers, and other adult allies had significant impact, “on their decision to remain in, or relocate from, their communities” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 17). David L. Brown (2002) supports these assertions, arguing that, “migration decisions are seldom made by atomized individuals. Instead, the decision to move or stay, and the choice of destination are likely to... involve at least some degree of collective decision making” (p. 9). He further notes the presence and importance of,

“multilevel social process[es] in which individuals are embedded in households, households in communities, and so on. The embeddedness perspective provides a relational view of social and economic action that helps to explain variability in individual and/or household migration behaviour. Multilevel social

relationships... provide the means by which individuals and/or households obtain resources, information, and social assistance in the broadest sense... [A] relational view permits one to investigate how social relations contribute to the decision to engage in particular types of behavior such as work, voluntary activities, or... migration” (Brown, 2002, p. 13).

Undoubtedly, the community-focused sentiments and convictions – the ‘*sense of community*’ - modeled to young people during instances of adult interaction have the potential to impress greatly upon them (Malatest & Associates, 2002). Brown (2002) indeed notes that, “the volume and direction of migration are affected by information, ideas, and resources embedded in networks that link family, friends, and neighbours” (p. 8). At times, these sentiments are positive, with older members espousing rural communities as a ‘safe’, ‘welcoming’, or a ‘good place to raise a family’ (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 9); however, one individual participating in the Canadian focus group survey exclaimed that “[t]he attitude of peers and parents is one of the reasons youth leave. When they hear things like ‘this place sucks’ and ‘there’s nothing for you here,’ of course they’re going to leave” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 17).

In this regard, Gabriel (2006) reveals that rural youth may find themselves, “caught between two competing injunctions... that young people should develop their skills and their knowledge in order to ‘get ahead’..., and that they should ‘stay at home’ in order to contribute to the future development of the [area]” (p. 36-37). In cases where local educational and occupational opportunities are limited, youth may actually experience social stigma associated with the very act of *remaining* in a rural community. In a study by Eacott & Sonn (2006), “[a]bout half of the participants alluded to the presence of an implicit expectation in their community that willed youth to leave. Participants felt that young people who remained in their rural communities were viewed negatively by others. They perceived that within the community

there was an unspoken belief which associated staying at home with failure” (p. 210). Indeed, ‘stayers’ may risk what Corbett (2005) describes as being, “cast as redundant rustics who resist modernization by staying in the ‘wrong places’, blocking what is considered progress” (p. 54). Nevertheless, he asserts that, “a rough life in a known community among family and friends may look better to many youth than taking a very expensive shot at [a]... journey that represents an expensive, unproven, and uncertain path” (Corbett, 2005, p. 65). These observations provide insight into, “why migration and staying are not simple responses to local disadvantage, why some young people may ‘lower their aspirations’ to stay in the area or to return to it, having once left, and why some migrants may yet return. But they also show how some children are socialised by their communities and their families into migration behaviour in their young adulthood, while others are socialised into staying on” (Jones, 1999, p. 20).

‘Feelings of Belonging’

Feelings of belonging, in a general sense, may be considered a product of youths’ “overall experiences of inclusion and exclusion” within a given rural community (Jones, 1999, as cited in Pretty et al., 2006, p. 229). As a subjective experience, ‘belongingness’ emerges based on the degree to which youth locate their personal identities within the home community, and through their experiences of connection with local people and places (Corbett, 2005; Eacott & Sonn, 2006). Feelings of ‘belonging’, and conversely ‘loneliness’, undoubtedly have significant impact on youths’ perceived quality of life within rural areas. They manifest within, “the young person both at an individual interpersonal level (with peers and family), as well as at a social context level (within school and residential neighbourhood)” (Chipuer, Bramston, & Pretty, 2003, p. 80). It is not surprising to note that, “[i]ncreasing evidence suggests that young people’s

sense of belonging within the place where they grow up, plays an important role in the development of a healthy adjusted self” (Chipuer, Bramston, & Pretty, 2003, p. 81).

In 2008, Michael Leyshon published a mixed-methods qualitative study which analyzed creative multimedia submissions from rural youth in the United Kingdom. These items (including mobile phone text messages, video diaries, photographs, and drawings), in combination with primary interviews, led him to make several assertions regarding identity formation and belongingness amongst rural young people: Firstly that, “rural youth’s identities are not fixed or immutable but rather that they are fluid, temporal and constantly evolving... their identities are always a subjective reinterpretation of the self in an ongoing daily process that links them to a sense of place...”; Secondly that, “rural youth define themselves through attempting to ‘fix’ their sense of belonging... This process leads to numerous contradictions and paradoxes in young people’s lives as they actively construct a sense of self and the world around them”; Thirdly that, “young people can hold a different perspective on a place at different moments in time”; And finally that, “rural youth’s identities are emergent depending on the social circumstances they experience” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 22).

Jones (1999) further discusses the fact that, “[b]elonging is a matter not only of individual choice but also of community acceptance. While some [young people] grow up as locals and are likely to remain locals for the rest of their lives, there are also some whose socio-spatial identity is continually subject to negotiation” (Jones, 1999, p. 19). Jones’ study examined the migration experiences of Scottish youth whom he typified as either ‘in-migrants’ (those who had moved to the community during childhood) or ‘locals’ (those whose families were rooted in the area over generations). He further sub-divided youth into the categories of ‘stayers’ (those currently residing with their rural communities), or ‘leavers’ (those who had left rural

communities to settle in more urban locales). His subsequent analysis revealed that, “[a] sense of belonging to the local community can be inherited, can develop or can be inhibited during the early life course... though [youth] have opportunities for action, they are also continually subject to external constraint” (Jones, 1999, p. 18-19).

According to Jones’ analysis, youth who were more recent in-comers to the community were at increased risk of social exclusion and separation, in comparison with those who were long-standing residents. He hypothesized that in-migrants’ sense of identity may be misaligned with the identity of the rural community, as a result of their varied life experiences. He also reasoned that in-migrant youth may fail to be ‘legitimized’ or fully accepted by locals, and may be more likely to face discrimination at the hands of others. These incomers, not surprisingly, were also more likely to be ‘leavers’ who migrated from their rural communities in young adulthood, as they, “may never have developed a strong identification with the communities in which they lived, may always have felt excluded, and may have been only too happy to leave as soon as they could...” (Jones, 1999, p. 19). While Jones did not identify a, “clear separation of critics from supporters of the community”, he did discover, “a tendency for dissenters to leave and ‘conformists’ to remain” (Jones, 1999, p. 19). He further acknowledged variation in representations of ‘identity’ and ‘belongingness’ amongst both ‘stayers’ *and* ‘leavers’, and reflects on this trend in the following passage:

“The research found among stayers some who rejected local normative values and longed to be free, and others who accepted the constraint to conform. The migrant, by contrast... appears still to be on a quest for his or her identity... Since many out-migrants were incomers in their childhood, they are less likely to reflect tradition. Among the migrants, we can further identify those... who retain a nostalgic affection for the rural communities of their childhood..., using it as a psychological basis from which to explore the world; while others... appear to have no sense of spatial identity (and even reject the need for it)” (Jones, 1999, p.

19).

In this regard, Jones (1999) acknowledges that individual variation in local ‘belongingness’ may be a result of participation in a *variety* of socially and geographically-based ‘communities’. He notes the prevalence of societal divisions within rural areas, “mainly relating to social class and incomer-local differentiation”, yet he also emphasizes that, “communities continue on to other levels, such as households, kinship and adolescence... Young people are thus members of an age community, or a household community, which could be at odds with their identification with the local town or village... [T]his might constitute not one community but several, where church, school, kin, etc., may not be in the same locality” (Jones, 1999, p. 7-8). Eacott & Sonn (2006) also found that, “there is a presence of multiple belongings for [youth]... as they have not allowed themselves to belong to one place definitively over another... community can have different geographical and psychological boundaries for individuals and... one can have a sense of community within several settings simultaneously” (p. 212). Corbett (2005), through study of rural dwellers in the Digby Neck peninsula of the province of Nova Scotia, extends this concept in a more physical sense. He observes that while rural areas, “may not be growing in terms of population... boundaries appear to be opening up to include a wider geographical space... Almost universal access to short-range car travel allows residents to remain in their ‘community’ while at the same time leaving it. Although Digby Neck remains distinct... residents’ lived sense of community has expanded to encompass a surrounding area” (p. 61).

Gabriel (2006) similarly favours a “multi-vocal and hybrid notion of identity”, where, “the self is no longer viewed as a fixed and stable referent, but rather... is strategic and positional (ie. enacted in particular localities)” (p. 43). She notes that a rural young person, like any young adult, may face significant challenges when interacting, “with a mixed audience of family and

friends who hold different expectations about who [he or] she is” (Gabriel, 2006, p. 40). Her research focuses on youth who have already exited rural areas, and are involved in the process of negotiating rural-to-urban social transitions; however, she stresses that all young people (in this case, those still residing within rural communities) are extremely versatile in accommodating their sense of personal identity, as well as their impressions of ‘belongingness’ within differing situations and localities. Plainly put, the “most common strategy employed by the young people was simply to adjust themselves, their behaviour, their attitudes and their conversation to the particular context in which they found themselves” (Gabriel, 2006, p. 40). Thus, success or failure within any particular social milieu may contribute to, but not represent the whole of, a young person’s overall ‘sense of belongingness’ within a given rural community.

‘Level of Social Engagement’

A third determinant in the local ‘mooring’ of young people, as revealed in rural migration literature, is the *level of social engagement* undertaken by youth within the home community. Studies by Elder, King & Conger (1996), Hedlund (1993), Eacott & Sonn (2006) and others, have emphasized repeatedly that youth who have the opportunity to be active within their communities, through various avenues, “exhibit higher levels of community attachment (Hummon, 1992; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981) and are thus less likely to move (Stinner et al., 1992) when compared to people who are minimally involved” (Elder, King, & Conger, 1996, p. 400). In general, the ‘social engagement’ of youth has been evaluated through two differing approaches: Firstly, through investigation of youth participation in organized settings, such as interest-based clubs, sports teams, and youth groups or community centres; And secondly, through appraisal of opportunities for youth to voice their opinions and concerns in relation to community matters.

According to Eacott & Sonn (2006), “[a]ctivity settings are the basis for social processes that lead to shared systems of meaning, understanding experiences, and ways of relating to the world for participants” (p. 208). In specific, their research examined,

“the role of sport in rural communities and the function it serves in promoting community connectedness. All participants made some reference to either their own involvement in sport or the position sport filled in their community... [it] brought people together and provided them with the opportunity to socialise and engage” (Eacott & Sonn, 2006, 208-209).

The authors observed that organized recreation was a community ‘integrator’ and ‘connector’, and provided youth with, “an opportunity to learn about local culture and social rules... it guaranteed acceptance and provided individuals with a sense of belonging and membership” (Eacott & Sonn, 2006, p. 211). Similarly, Elder, King, & Conger (1996) recognized the importance of Christian religious activity as a ‘core institution’ of rural communities in the American mid-west. Worship practices served to ‘moor’ young people through, “association with peers in a community of kin and family through services, education classes, religious ceremonies, social functions, and church groups” (p. 419). Mair (2009) further recognizes club spaces as locales in which, “regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home... and work” may occur (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 16, as cited in Mair, 2009, p. 461). These places, “[act] as a social leveler in that individuals participate equally; conversation is a key activity; there is capacity for accessibility and accommodation; [and] participants can become ‘regulars’” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 22-42, as cited in Mair, 2009, p. 461). Her research indicates that, “clubs are not just outlets for physical activity and socializing but also provide informal networks of support... participants described membership as a way to address loneliness and to feel part of something that extends beyond family and work relationships” (Mair, 2009, p. 463).

Naturally, there are many practical barriers to the participation of youth in rural recreational activities. As has been discussed, general “impoverishment in the area of social facilities and recreation” is a common concern of youth across studies (Meek, 2008, p. 129). Rural, “[o]ut-migration and an aging population are both factors in and results of decreasing opportunities for employment, leisure and sport activities... [Existing] club members are aging and the clubs struggle to attract young working families, young adults and youth” (Mair, 2009, p. 462). Not surprisingly, rural youth frequently cite that the improvement and/or addition of local activities geared towards *their interests* (rather than those of children or the aged), would contribute a great deal towards the retention of young people in rural localities (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 21). Meek (2008) has further found evidence to suggest that youth may be precluded from participation in local activities due to, “participation costs, availability of transport and [degree of] parental support” (p. 127).

Hedlund (1993) addresses these inclinations more directly, finding that ‘isolation’ is a common theme in youths’ perceptions of rural recreation and thus, “is a term with several dimensions: difficulty with transportation, few social activities or cultural events, and lack of exposure to differing cultural or ethnic viewpoints” (p. 154). He further notes, “the difficulty of organizing social activities with friends for any adolescent who cannot drive an automobile... As a result, adolescents become more dependent on parents’ involvement in their social lives, even for romantic relationships. In addition, the lack of activities available in a small town requires travel somewhere to do things together” (Hedlund, 1993, p. 154). Notwithstanding these personal challenges, “[i]solation strains family relationships also. Many parents do not seem so involved with their children that they will take time to support their social lives. Others try and are unable for many reasons” (Hedlund, 1993, p. 154). Perhaps it is not surprising then that,

‘perceived opportunities for young people within the community’ have been found to negatively correlate with age (Meek, 2008, p. 127). Evidently, “younger residents are fairly optimistic about the opportunities available to them, whereas those in the older age groups tend to be less confident in this matter, disagreeing with the notion that opportunities are available to those who take them” (Meek, 2008, p. 128).

Limited research has also suggested that young women may experience unique barriers to rural social participation, in consequence of the gendered nature of many local activities. Elder, King & Conger (1996) illustrate, in general, that young women may be disadvantaged in their ability to pursue and realize personal ‘achievement goals’ within rural forums and on the farm - spheres which are recognized as traditionally “male-oriented on social options and recognition” (p. 417). Mair’s (2009) ethnography of a rural curling association carries forward this intuition, finding that gender was, “a key organizing factor of nearly every aspect of club life... Women were predominantly, but not exclusively, found in traditional roles such as cooking while men seemed most likely to be in charge of the physical upkeep of the club as well as in leadership positions. While curling is a sport known for achieving better gender parity than most... the power relations that structure volunteer work were constructed along traditional gendered lines. Noting, however, that many clubs strive for equity in leadership positions (eg. president, board members) and that many have come far in a short period of time is important” (Mair, 2009, p. 462).

A second aspect of the *social engagement* of youth relates to the civic ‘role’ of young people within rural communities, and the degree to which they are able and willing to participate in local discussions and decision-making. Eacott & Sonn (2006) have characterized the ‘role of youth’ as, “the role that participants and youth in general played in their rural communities, the

amount of influence and input they had in the broader community and what needs of youth were and were not being met by the community” (p. 209). As noted in preceding discussion, Malatest & Associates (2002) uncovered a sense of ‘disconnect’ amongst youth in rural Canada in this regard. The, “perception of being unwanted and unheard... surfaced in discussions of youth involvement in community decision-making... [they] felt that, at best, the community paid lip service to the views of youth. Youth are tolerated, but not taken seriously” (p. 19). Likewise, Hedlund (1993) recorded that many of his participants, “feel little ownership of, or ability to influence, community dynamics. Consequently, frustration and bitterness [was] evident in their discussions” (p. 156). Subjects in Eacott & Sonn’s (2006) study expressed a more tempered view, “that although their communities did not provide... [equal] opportunities for the voice of youth, they had made some attempts” (p. 209). One participant exclaimed that, “... it wasn’t that they didn’t want to spend the time catering for our needs. I think it was maybe just that they didn’t know what to do... [T]hey didn’t have a youth committee or whatever to sort of decide what (the needs of youth) were” (Eacott & Sonn, 2006, p. 209).

Despite feelings of irritation towards mature members of the community, the young people involved in Malatest & Associates’ (2002) study also acknowledged peer ‘apathy’ as, “a serious barrier to increased youth involvement ” (p. 20). Indeed, some adolescents, “admitted that it was difficult to get youth to care enough to go to Council meetings and make a difference because, ‘it’s easier to complain than to go and make an effort for change’” (p. 19). Eacott & Sonn (2006) similarly observed a wide variance in the degree of youths’ desire for civic involvement. They relate, “[t]here were mixed responses when the role of youth was discussed. Some were highly involved and influential in their communities, others were not afforded the opportunity of involvement largely due to small population size, and some were indifferent” (p.

209). Nonetheless, rural young people from diverse backgrounds have repeatedly expressed the desire for input on issues that influence their experience within the home community. Meek (2008) found that 95% of her sample of 15-18 year olds were, “in agreement with the statement: ‘Young people should have a say about decisions that affect their lives’” (p. 128). She argues that, “[t]his result directly contradicts the widely held representation of youth as apathetic and demonstrates how young people in the town are keen to become involved in community decision-making processes that affect them” (Meek, 2008, p. 128).

At the least, youth subjects have brought forward consistent suggestions as to how rural communities may acknowledge and validate the opinions of young people. As Hedlund (1993) has noted, “[i]f adolescence is a period of developing identity..., then being recognized as a person of worth by adults is critical in overcoming the marginal status felt by participants” (p. 158). There is widespread concern within the literature that rural communities may not possess the needed social and/or economic resources to provide for the engagement of young people in civic life (Eacott & Sonn, 2006; Hedlund, 1993; Malatest & Associates, 2002; Meek, 2008); however, the results of Malatest & Associates’ (2002) focus group discussion, as well as other investigations, have found that, “implementation of youth-focused initiatives did not often require major expenditures or policy-changes. Having the community express an interest in youth was seen as an important first step in developing ‘youth-friendly rural communities’” (p. 20). Further, “...by working with neighbouring communities on developing youth action plans, each community can develop activities to enhance or compliment what is offered” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 32).

According to Meek (2008) when, “[a]sked what one thing a youth service could do to make the area a better place for young people,... [youths’] responses fell into three distinct

categories of roughly equal prominence: to create facilities (set up activities, place to go); to give advice and support (for example, ‘someone to talk to about problems’); and to empower young people (for example, ‘help us to prevent things happening’, ‘help us get heard’, ‘meetings’, ‘a public office to go to’)” (p. 131). Youth involved in the Canadian Rural Partnership study also emphasized, “that youth involvement would increase if tangible changes resulted from youth suggestions or input” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 20). In response to participant feedback, researchers formulated the following strategies for the civic engagement of young people: Firstly, to, “[e]ncourage local governments to adopt a pro-active approach to include rural youth in the decision-making process”, through creation of a ‘Youth Advisory Committee’, development of a ‘Youth Action Plan’, and/or the assigning of a ‘Youth Representative/Advocate’ (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 34); Secondly, to, “[e]ncourage rural communities to make greater efforts to publicize youth issues, activities and strategies”, in order to, “show that the community truly ‘values’ their youth”, and to “publicize youth accomplishments to exemplify the success that other rural youth may strive to achieve” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 34); Thirdly to, “[e]ncourage local governments to identify youth initiatives as a priority in community plans and strategies” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 34); And lastly to, “[e]ncourage local governments/communities to work together to develop strategies to engage rural youth” by promoting, “youth opportunities/activities in surrounding communities (ie. rural nodes) to enhance and compliment all communities involved” (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 34).

Social Capital Theory

Evidently, the social ‘pull’ of rural communities (or indeed the lack thereof) can have great effect on youth’s perceptions of their hometowns, their feelings of belonging, and ultimately their sentiments with regards to migration. Accordingly, a theoretical method is here proposed by which the ‘mooring’ of Canada’s rural youth might be examined. This theory illustrates the ways in which communities build cultural resources in the form of what has been called ‘social capital’. As will be seen, the presence of social capital within communities is associated with increased levels of social trust, reciprocity between members, and the securing of networks of support (Flora, 1998; Flora & Flora, 2008; Putnam, 1995). Not surprisingly, these are some of the very factors that rural youth have identified as influencing their sentiments regarding out-migration. As will be discussed, community networks that are *high* in social capital should display significant social ‘pull’ and an increased capability to ‘moor’ and foster their young members. In contrast, communities which are *low* in social capital will have a less binding influence on inhabitants, and may be more likely to lose young people to outside areas.

Defining ‘Social Capital’

According to Putnam (2000), “the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value... Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals” (p. 18-19). Alternately stated, “[w]hereas economic capital is in people’s bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of relationships” (Portes, 1998, p. 7, as cited in Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 87). Within the varied contexts of social interaction, social capital exists as a valued social and emotional resource, which is accessible through

relational connections and, “expressed emotions between persons that validate, express caring, or provide information” (Robison & Flora, 2003, p. 1188). Social capital may thus be conceived as an intangible ‘fund’ or ‘stock’, from which social groups draw to support their members and promote development (Kay, 2006, p. 163; Putnam, 1996). As a resource, social capital is not only productive but also cumulative, and the interactions that lead to its creation may allow for its veritable “stock-piling” within community networks (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 92). Social capital circulates *within* these networks, and differs, “from other forms of capital in that the more social capital is used, the more social capital is generated. That is, the more organizations or individuals trust and develop relationships between themselves and others – the more those relationships, and thus social capital, is strengthened” (Kay, 2006, p. 163-164).

The Creation of Social Capital: ‘Rational-Choice’ vs. ‘Embeddedness’ Perspectives

The intangible nature of ‘social capital’ as a theoretical construct has led to significant debate amongst social researchers, who have operationalized the phenomenon from a variety of differing perspectives (Robison & Flora, 2003). Many criticisms of the theory’s explanatory power stem from these definitional disagreements, and from concerns that its ‘central elements’ must be clearly identified in order to facilitate positive change within community networks (Flora, 1998, p. 489). In this regard, Castle (1998) appropriately cautions that, “[u]nless the social capital concept is used... in a comparable manner, it will come to have little value as an analytical construct” (as cited in Robison & Flora, 2003, p. 1187). In response to these concerns, it is of importance to here illustrate two central approaches to the creation of social capital within community networks – in specific, the so-called *rational-choice* and *embeddedness* perspectives – and to locate the following body of research within an appropriate conceptual context.

The *rational-choice* view of social capital is largely inspired by the tenets of social exchange theory, as well by the field of economics (Flora, 1998; Robison & Flora, 2003). This theoretical approach, “emphasizes the role of rational economic utility-maximizing behavior” within social interactions, and places conceptual priority upon the self-interest and personal goals of individual actors (Flora, 1998; Robison & Flora, 2003, p. 1191). According to Flora (1998), “[r]ational choice proponents do not see a need for more than self-interested behaviour for social capital to develop” (Flora, 1998, p. 485-486); therefore, social capital is regarded as an inadvertent ‘by-product’ of social activity - “a resource individuals use for their own self-interested ends” (Flora, 1998, p. 484). From this viewpoint, individuals engage in interaction in order to facilitate the exchange of socio-emotional goods – those assets which satisfy individual desires for personal validation and external sympathy (Robison & Flora, 2003). Thus, “[p]ersons who have sympathy for others supply social capital. Those who are the objects of others’ sympathy own social capital” (Robison & Flora, 2003, p. 1188). While this exchange of goods is seen to facilitate the creation of social capital within community forums, no, “particular feelings between members, including altruistic feelings of any sort” are essential to its creation (Taylor & Singleton, 1993, as cited in Flora, 1998, p. 486; Robison & Flora, 2003). Thus, “the motivating force... is not value convictions, but the anticipation of utilities associated with ‘good standing’ in a particular collectivity” (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993, as cited in Flora, 1998).

Not surprisingly, the *rational-choice* approach to social capital has met with significant criticism from scholars who recognize and prioritize the socio-structural context of human behaviour (Flora, 1998, p. 483). In contrast, an *embedded* view of social capital, while according a degree of freedom to the individual, nonetheless acknowledges that, “agency is shaped or nudged in certain directions by... existing networks of social relations and commonly held

beliefs” (Flora, 1998, p. 484). In this context, social capital is seen to be comprised of local social networks, norms and value-systems which promote trust, mutual obligation and communal identity (Flora & Flora, 2008). At times, this mutual obligation is, “*specific*: I’ll do this for you if you do that for me. Even more valuable, however, is a norm of *generalized* reciprocity: I’ll do this for you without expecting anything specific back from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road” (Putnam, 2000, p. 20-21). Within an *embeddedness* framework, ‘dense’ social networks serve to establish and reinforce such communally-oriented sentiments among individuals (Putnam, 2000, p. 20). Social capital is thus an ‘interactive’ phenomenon - “an attribute of communities, which is more than the summing up of individual social capital” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 117). Thus, “[s]ome of the benefit from an investment in social capital goes to by-standers, while some of the benefit redounds to the immediate interest of the person making the investment” (Putnam, 2000, p. 20). Further, “community members are expected to contribute to the group while receiving benefits... direct pay back to the donor is not required, or, in some cases, even expected” (Flora, 1998, p. 484).

In keeping with this approach, Putnam (1995) defends three general positions: Firstly, that “networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust” (Putnam, 1995, p. 2); Secondly, that “[s]uch networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved” (Putnam, 1995, p. 2); And finally, that “[d]ense networks of interaction... broaden the participants’ sense of self, developing the ‘I’ into ‘we’... enhancing the participants’ ‘taste’ for collective benefits” (Putnam, 1995, p. 2). Flora and Flora (2008) concur with these propositions, asserting that social capital, bolstered by reciprocity and mutual trust within social

networks, “contributes to a sense of a common identity and shared future... [and] facilitates groups’ working together” (p. 18).

Forms of Social Capital: ‘Bonding’ & ‘Bridging’ in Rural Communities

According to an *embeddedness* view, the social capital that exists within community networks assumes two distinct forms – that of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ (Flora & Flora, 2008; Putnam, 2000). As will be seen, the presence of both forms is essential to the overall social well-being of a particular community; however, each is manifested, and subsequently enacts its interpersonal effects, in differing ways (Agnitsch, Flora, & Ryan, 2006; Flora & Flora, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Robison & Flora, 2003; Zacharakis & Flora, 2005). ‘Bonding’ social capital may be defined simply as, “connections among individuals and groups with similar backgrounds. These connections may be based principally on class, ethnicity, kinship, gender, or similar social characteristics... [B]onding ties are affective or emotionally charged” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 125). ‘Bridging’ social capital, conversely, refers to those relations that connect, “diverse groups within the community to each other and to groups outside the community... Bridging social capital fosters diversity of ideas and brings together diverse people” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 125). In practice, individual social networks tend not to be exclusively ‘bonding’ or ‘bridging’ in orientation, but rather are seen as promoting both forms of social capital to differing degrees (Putnam, 2000).

Jan L. Flora and Cornelia Butler Flora, through extensive research in rural communities throughout the mid-Western United States, have established an illustrative ‘typology’ which details the social consequences of the relative presence or absence of such ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ connections (Agnitsch, Flora, & Ryan, 2006; Flora & Flora, 1993; Flora & Flora,

2008; Robison & Flora, 2003; Zacharakis & Flora, 2005). They note that, ‘bonding’ versus ‘bridging’ attachments,

“affect community change differently... community development is more likely to succeed in communities that optimize both strong [‘bonding’] and weak [‘bridging’] ties, because strong ties forge common goals and a common identity, while weak ties encourage participation within the community of diverse groups with complementary capabilities, and foster residents reach out to acquire information, knowledge, and resources from diverse sources outside the community” (Robison & Flora, 2003, p. 1190).

The first of the community typologies is characterized by low levels of both ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ connections, and thus by an absence of social capital. In such a situation, Flora & Flora (2008) argue that, “individuals... view themselves as self-reliant – or as totally adrift... People in communities that lack social capital are more likely to experience stress, hypertension, and mental health problems, among other difficulties. Crime rates are high... personal security is a major problem” (p. 127-128). In the second scenario, where ‘bonding’ is high but ‘bridging’ is low, “the community may organize in opposition to the outside in a kind of solidarity... different homogeneous groups or factions within the community may have varying perspectives on the kinds of change that might benefit their community. The groups do not trust each other and therefore are unwilling to cooperate with one another” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 128). Thirdly, where ‘bridging’ is high and ‘bonding’ is low, “some degree of control from outside the community is exercised through community elites, [or] helping professionals... Although this pattern of social capital is also built on norms of reciprocity and mutual trust... those relationships are vertical rather than horizontal. Power is clearly concentrated” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 128).

As a result, the final (and theoretically most productive) scenario is one in which the community supports a balance between both ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ networks. When both

forms of social capital are high, the community will have facilitated a social environment in which, “not only is each member of the community expected to give, earning status and pleasure from doing so, but each is expected to receive as well. Each person in the community is deemed capable of sharing something valuable with all members of the community, including contributions to collective projects” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 129). In addition, “such communities also have diverse contacts with the outside, which provide needed information to the community, information that often can be used to generate outside resources without exercising control over the community” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 129). When both horizontal and vertical social connections are available and utilized, rural communities reinforce what is referred to as an ‘Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure’ – an atmosphere in which “collective action for community betterment” is eased and encouraged (Flora, 1998, p. 490; Flora & Flora, 2008). According to the research of Flora & Flora and colleagues, the development of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital (as evidenced by such practices as the involvement of youth in local affairs, support for local entrepreneurship, and the recruitment of external funding and support), is a key ‘first step’ in reversing the ‘downward spiral’ of rural socio-economic circumstances in recent decades (Emery & Flora, 2006, p. 22). Not only do ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ together serve to bolster the socio-cultural viability of rural communities, but they further act as a gateway to improvement in financial and political circumstances (Emery & Flora, 2006; Flora & Flora, 1993).

Civic Organizations and Social Capital

Not surprisingly, both ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital may exist in a wide variety of social networks. These networks may be facilitated by formal institutions, such as a, “PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) organisation or a national organisation of any sort, or a labour

union, formally organized with a chairman and a president, and membership dues and so on” (Putnam, 2001, p. 2). Alternately, “[s]ome forms of social capital, like the group of people who gather at the bar every Thursday evening, are highly informal. And yet, both of these constitute networks in which there can easily develop reciprocity, and in which there can be gains” (Putnam, 2001, p. 2). While certain of these social organizations mandate what Putnam (2000) describes as, “explicit public-regarding purposes”, others exist merely for the “private enjoyment of members” (Putnam, 2001, p. 22). Further, as exemplified by 4-H Ontario and the Junior Farmers’ Association - the rural service clubs illustrated within this study - some social organizations “serve both public and private ends” (Putnam, 2000, p. 22).

Significantly to the following research, Robert Putnam casts membership rates of civic organizations as strong predictors for the presence of social capital in North American communities (Putnam, 2000). In specific, he considers social capital to have been in a general decline since the 1970’s, and associates this decline with the shrinking membership numbers of these civic organizations. He cites that,

“reductions are apparent in the numbers of volunteers for mainline civic organizations, such as the Boy Scouts (off by 26 percent since 1970) and the Red Cross (off by 61 percent since 1970)... Fraternal organizations have also witnessed a substantial drop in membership during the 1980’s and 1990’s... In sum, after expanding steadily throughout most of this century, many major civic organizations have experienced a sudden, substantial, and nearly simultaneous decline in membership over the last decade or two” (Putnam, 1995, p. 69-70).

While Putnam acknowledges the growth of new mass-membership volunteer organizations in recent decades, he cautions against their association with the fostering of social capital. For example, “national environmental organizations (like the Sierra Club) and feminist groups (like the National Organization for Women) grew rapidly during the 1970’s and 1980’s and now count on hundreds of thousands of dues-paying members... The national administrators of these

organizations are among the most feared lobbyists in Washington, in large part because of their massive mailing lists of presumably loyal members” (Putnam, 1995, p. 70-71); however, he cautions that, “[t]he bond between any two members of the Sierra Club is less like the bond between any two members of a gardening club and more like the bond between any two Red Sox fans... they root for the same team and they share the some of the same interests, but they are unaware of each other’s existence. Their ties, in short, are to common symbols, common leaders, and perhaps common ideals, but not to one another” (Putnam, 1995, p. 71). Researchers are reminded that, “[s]ocial capital refers to networks of social connection – doing *with*. Doing good *for* other people, however laudable, is not part of the definition of social capital” (Putnam, 2000, p. 116-117).

Social Capital & the Mooring of Youth in Rural Volunteer Organizations

According to the preceding discussion, we may look to volunteer organizations as prime sources and indicators of social capital within rural areas. In keeping with the recommendations of Putnam, and Flora & Flora, research exploring the ‘mooring’ of rural youth should centre on the examination of volunteer organizations which allow for the ‘active’ membership of young people - face-to-face interactions, the attending of meetings and gatherings, and/or the completion of shared activities (Putnam, 1995). Any community organization that allows for the active pursuit of shared interests has the potential to provide avenues for collaboration and the building of social capital. This may include such diverse collectives as local sports leagues, vintage car clubs, church groups, or mentoring programs; however, in this case, we are looking to the two ‘classic’ volunteer organizations oriented towards rural youth in this province - 4-H Ontario, and the Junior Farmers Association of Ontario.

It is here hypothesized, that the social capital built and circulated within the above organizations should have a positive effect on the ‘mooring’ of rural young people. The greater the stock of social capital that is available within a given organization, the greater should be the internal ‘pull’ that the local organization and surrounding community exert upon youth. Further research should provide evidence which supports a negative relationship between the presence of social capital within a given organization, and expressed levels of local detachment amongst involved youth. Due to the intangible nature of ‘social capital’ as a resource and theoretical construct, this study will make no attempt towards its direct measure (Robison & Flora, 2003); however, as social capital is evidenced by increased levels of social trust, reciprocity between community members, and the securing of networks of support, then several criterion may be established by which the above hypothesis may be tested. If the presence of social capital within rural volunteer organizations does, in fact, have an effect on the local ‘mooring’ of young people, then further research is likely to support the following assertions:

- Firstly, participation in voluntary organizations (ie. 4-H and Junior Farmers) should allow youth to feel that they are *active contributors to their communities of origin*. Youth involved in these rural associations should indicate a belief in the reciprocity of their home communities. They will perceive not only that older generations appreciate young people’s contributions to community debates and dilemmas, but also that these elders give value to the concerns and wishes of young people. In other words, the ‘involved’ rural youth should show evidence of a sense of collective benefit within the rural area of origin.
- Secondly, voluntary participation amongst rural youth should foster *communication and understanding across generations*. Perceptions of the stereotyping of youth as deviants

should be relatively infrequent amongst volunteers. Young people should indicate that they have had adequate opportunity to advance a positive reputation for themselves and for their age cohort.

- Thirdly, in locales where social capital (facilitated by youth volunteer organizations) is high, community members should share *high levels of social trust*. This may be evidenced by a general sense of the ‘safety’ of rural living, or by shared sentiments that youth are respectful of the property and the well-being of the community as a whole.
- Fourthly, youth participating in volunteer organizations should have an overall *sense of social support and belonging* within their communities of origin. Youth should be able to identify the presence of mentor figures and/or social support networks within their hometowns. Further, involved young people should indicate a sense of pride for, and identification with, the traditions of their communities of origin.
- Finally, and perhaps most significantly, rural youth who are active in volunteer organizations should indicate a relatively *low preference for future out-migration* from the home community.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & METHODS

Introduction

This chapter, appropriately, will explicate the theoretical and practical methods by which the following research project was envisioned and undertaken. This section will begin with a discussion of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying a ‘symbolic discourse’ approach to youth interaction, as well a brief overview of the ways in which this approach has informed subsequent questions for research. Consideration will be given to the relevance of qualitative methods (and in particular semi-structured interviews) for the purposes of this study, and a detailed account of the sampling, recruitment, and interview process will be provided. Fittingly, this chapter closes with a synopsis of the means by which interview data were organized and coded for later analysis.

Ontological & Epistemological Assumptions

Discussion thus far has postulated the lived experience of rural Canadian youth as a ‘symbolic discourse’ – “a pattern of symbolic relationships and meanings” - in which reality is, “sustained through a process of human action and interaction... open to reaffirmation or change through the interpretations and actions of individuals members” (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 494). Rural young people have been portrayed as ‘social actors’ who possess personal agency, who are actively engaged in the realisation of the world around them, and who organize their behaviour according to the bearings of personal meaning. Indeed, rural youth have consistently been demonstrated to make use of, “language, labels, [and] routines for impression management”, as they seek to understand the rural landscape and their place within it (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 494). These ontological assumptions predicate an indispensable

understanding that, “[t]he fundamental character of the social world is embedded in the network of subjective meanings that sustain the rule-like actions that lend it enduring form... [youth] live in a world of symbolic significance, interpreting and enacting a meaningful relationship with that world” (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 494).

Within the scope of sociological inquiry, differing, “assumptions regarding ontology and human nature pose interesting problems of epistemology. The different world views they reflect imply different grounds for knowledge about the social world” (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 493). Within the context of this study, the epistemological aim is thus to discern the patterns of ‘symbolic discourse’ which may occur within the context of rural and youth-focused volunteer organizations, to illustrate the mutual social construction of such patterns, and to reveal the “roles that language, symbols, and myths play in the shaping of any given reality” (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p. 497). In keeping with these pursuits, the following directives for research are proposed:

Questions for Research

1. What does “rurality” mean for young people in rural Canada?
 - What do young people perceive to be their economic and social role within rural communities?
 - What roles do they perceive that elder generations ascribe to them?
 - How do they imagine their future within rural communities?
2. How do youth volunteer organizations contribute to the building of social capital within rural Canadian communities?
 - What opportunities are provided for the active engagement of youth?
 - How do these organizations facilitate intergenerational communication and/or interaction?
 - In what ways, if any, do these organizations allow for the emergence of shared goals and identities across generations?

3. How do youth volunteer organizations impact the social ‘mooring’ of young people within rural Canadian communities?
 - How does volunteer participation impact youths’ sense of belonging?
 - How does youth volunteer participation affect perceived trust and reciprocity amongst community members?
 - How does volunteer participation impact youths’ intentions for future migration?

A Qualitative Approach

According to Malterud (2001), qualitative methods comprise a broad range of research strategies which offer insight into the, “meanings of social phenomena as experienced by individuals themselves, in their natural context” (p. 483). In a practical sense, qualitative methods necessitate the organization of observational or conversational data into ‘textual material’, which is then synthesized and analyzed to reveal underlying socio-cultural meaning (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). From this standpoint, qualitative research may be considered,

“an approach rather than a particular set of techniques, and its appropriateness derives from the nature of the social phenomena to be explored... the choice and adequacy of [any particular] method embodies a variety of assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and the methods through which that knowledge can be obtained, as well as a set of root assumptions about the nature of the phenomena to be investigated” (p. 491).

Guba and Lincoln (2004) have accordingly highlighted the utility of qualitative methods in understanding the ‘symbolic discourse’ of the social world, given that, “[h]uman behaviour, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities” (p. 19). Qualitative methodology acknowledges that, “[t]he etic (outsider) theory brought to bear on an inquiry by an investigator... may have little or no meaning within the emic (insider) view of studied individuals, groups, societies, or cultures” (Guba & Lincoln, 2004, p. 19). Such an approach thus prioritizes the internal validity of study conclusions, by allowing for the emergence of locally and culturally

significant understandings of social life (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). Qualitative study is also promoted as an ‘inclusive’ approach to sociological inquiry, as it allows for the inclusion of a multiplicity of variables throughout the research process, and prioritizes elucidation of the rich socio-physical contexts in which human interactions occur (Guba & Lincoln, 2004).

Malterud (2001) accordingly suggests certain methodological principles which, she argues, should be observed throughout the process of qualitative research. Firstly, qualitative sociologists must establish a commitment to ‘reflexivity’ in the study process. During the course of qualitative inquiry, “[a] researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (Malterud, 2001, p. 483-484); therefore, ‘objectivity’ in this context, “means to recognize that knowledge is partial and situated, and to account adequately for the effects of the positioned researcher” (Malterud, 2001, p. 484). Secondly, qualitative social research should involve an appropriate account of the ‘transferability’ of research findings. As such, “the aim of research is to produce information that can be shared and applied beyond the study setting... The study design should show a thorough consideration of what an adequate degree of transferability would be, in view of the assumptions of the research question, and present a relevant sampling strategy” (Malterud, 2001, p. 485); Finally, the author stresses that a, “thorough, well prepared, and well documented [qualitative] analysis is what distinguishes scientific approach from superficial conjecture... Only when the research can identify the systematic procedure that has been followed in this process, can it be shared with others” (Malterud, 2001, p. 486).

Reflexivity in Study Planning

As is not uncommon in the undertaking of sociological inquiry, the structure of this study underwent significant transformation early on in the research process. As will be seen, the organizational nature of local 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs was quickly found to be incongruent with proposed methods of contact and sampling. While these challenges proved initially complicating, a commitment to methodological reflexivity nonetheless allowed for the implementation of procedural adaptations designed to address the presented concerns; therefore, over the course of the following sub-sections, discussion will thus highlight both the *anticipated* approach to sampling that was adopted at the outset of this study, as well as the *actual* methods of contact employed, in answer to such procedural hurdles. Perhaps not surprisingly, the very manifestation of these challenges transformed the research process, and ultimately lent significant insight into both the physical and relational structures of youth volunteer organizations within rural Ontarian communities.

Proposed Sample & Study Area

Initially, research was aimed towards the inclusion of volunteers/members from five locally-based 4-H and Junior Farmer clubs. It was preferred, at the outset, that the clubs for recruitment should possess a range of differing subjects of interests where appropriate (as in the case of 4-H clubs), and should be situated within differing rural localities. As a result, the land-area under study was presumed likely to encompass approximately five separate rural and/or agricultural communities from across Southern Ontario. Due to the time and transportation-related limits imposed by the structure of a Masters thesis project, it was decided that each rural community/organization in question should be located within approximately 150 kilometers of the City of Guelph (the residential locality of the researcher). Further, it was determined that the

communities encompassed by the study should primarily possess populations under 5000 people, and should maintain a significant land-base dedicated to agricultural pursuits. Such stipulations regarding 'rural' population were implemented to provide for diversity in the interests and aims of 4-H and Junior Farmer clubs (as clubs from different regions may be involved in diverse activities and projects, depending on their interest and geographical location); however, they would also allow the researcher to exclude from analysis any urban centres which were inappropriate to the study's aims. (As relative 'proximity' to urban centers is a common feature of many rural areas and towns in Southern Ontario, this topic will be raised in more detail in the final 'Discussion' section.)

Approximately twenty-five volunteers, both male and female, were to be selected for participation in a series of semi-structured interviews. Ideally, twenty of these individuals would be youth volunteers themselves, ranging in age from approximately fifteen to twenty-four. Alternately, five individuals were to be organizational/club leaders, whose age range was anticipated to vary greatly, but who would likely be over the age of twenty-five. Interestingly, research involving rural young people has proven quite variable across studies, in terms of the age-ranges purported to designate 'youth'. A review of recent publications reveals a plethora of definitions for this age-cohort, seemingly spanning anywhere from thirteen to twenty-nine years old (Chuipey et al., 2002; Dupuy et al., 2000; Hedlund, 2008; Malatest & Assoc., 2002; Pretty et al., 2006); therefore, of utmost importance to the construction of this study was not to ascertain any particular objectivity regarding the age characteristics of 'young people', but rather to reflect upon (and explicate) the selection of an age-cohort which would most accurately address the aforementioned questions for research.

In this regard, several items were taken into consideration. The first, and perhaps most obvious, factor under review was the age requirement for participants of both the 4-H Ontario and Junior Farmers' clubs. As noted in the 'Background to Study' section of this discussion, 4-H Ontario currently accepts young people between the ages of 8 and 21 (the minimum age for participation having dropped significantly in recent years, in order to bolster membership) (4-H Canada, 2012; Lee, 1995). The Junior Farmers' association, conversely, is available to young rural dwellers aged 15 to 29 ('JFAO 2012 Annual Report', JFAO, 2013). While these two clubs in combination provide quite a far-reaching age-bracket in which to sample, it was decided that both the youngest and oldest of members collectively would not prove ideal research candidates. Youth aged 15 to 24, it was surmised, are beginning to assert a sense of personal identity and independence, to build significant personal relationships, and to more seriously plan for and look to the future. These individuals are more likely than their younger counterparts, to possess the maturity to needed reflect in some detail about their experiences as a volunteer and club member. Conversely, the rural experiences of older young adults may be increasingly complicated by life-events such as careers, marriage/commitments to partners, and starting a family.

With the inclusion of select numbers of adult 4-H leaders and Junior Farmers' executive members for interview (in addition to youth), the researcher must acknowledge what Stockdale (2006) has referred to as complications of 'memory-recall' (Stockdale, 2006, p. 358). In an effort to speak about volunteer experiences in their own youth, older participants may, "[w]ith hindsight... put a favourable and rational interpretation on their actions and lifetime events. They may only recall the main events and influences, omitting secondary factors. Moreover, they are often keen to portray their actions and experiences in positive terms" (Stockdale, 2006, p. 358). Despite this potential drawback, adult interview respondents are seen as key to the interview

process, for their ability to complete the social ‘picture’ of volunteering. Executive members and leaders are acknowledged as key players in the sustenance of rural volunteer organizations, and may illustrate for the researcher many of the integral organizational ‘goings on’ which are unseen or unacknowledged by youth.

Participant Recruitment

This study ultimately commenced with the identification of 4-H and Junior Farmers’ clubs within the aforementioned areas of Southern Ontario, through careful monitoring of local newspapers and regional 4-H and Junior Farmers’ websites. As the researcher possessed personal experience with 4-H and Junior Farmers’ involvement, prior knowledge of prominent clubs within the study region was also drawn upon to focus and direct search efforts. Once appropriate youth volunteer organizations had been determined and/or located, initial contact was extended through email and telephone correspondence with club leaders (4-H) and/or designated ‘executive members’ (JF). During initial contact, the purpose of the research project was explained to these representatives. They were advised that their participation, as well as the participation of their members, was voluntary. Furthermore, they were informed that their identities, as well as the identities of involved youth, would be kept confidential if they chose to participate (See Appendix A).

If leaders/executives indicated interest in having their clubs participate in the study, plans would then be attempted for the researcher to visit a pre-arranged club meeting. It was surmised that participating in the proceedings of established meetings would ease the process of contacting potential participants, allowing access to larger numbers of youth at a given time, and minimizing any inconvenience of assemblage to leaders. It was intended that at this meeting, the researcher would explain the purposes and aims of the research to youth directly. Initial

questions would be answered during these visits, and consent forms would be distributed to facilitate further participant reflection and the obtaining of parental consent if necessary (see Appendices B-D). As many completed consent forms would be collected at this time as possible, and any remaining consent forms would be collected by the researcher at a later date convenient for involved parties.

Unfortunately, in practice, this approach to participant solicitation proved less than fruitful. Several introductory emails to 4-H leaders and JF executive members failed to elicit any response. Certain leaders and executives, though responding to initial emails and/or telephone calls, failed to follow up with further instructions or details for arranging meeting visits. Others yet were agreeable to the purpose and idea of the research, but decided after reflection that a visit was not suitable for their clubs. (For example, one particular leader led a number of 4-H'ers under the age of fifteen, and perceived a meeting visit as inappropriate given that not all members were eligible to participate in the study. Certain Junior Farmers' executives also expressed concerns for the viability of a presentation, given the cramped agendas projected for monthly meetings.) In actuality, only one club-meeting 'visit' progressed in the manner exemplified above. At this particular meeting, a brief presentation was given to members and leaders of a 4-H club, questions from each were fielded, and consent forms distributed. Four consent forms were returned immediately by young people over the age of eighteen, as well as one form completed by a leader.

Thus, recruitment necessarily came to rely instead upon a 'snowballing' process, guided by youth participants as well as key leaders/executive members. Following initial email and telephone conversations, two 4-H leaders, two JF executive members, and one 4-H youth member (identified as an 4-H award recipient in a local newspaper), were visited individually at

their respective places of residence and/or a designated meeting place. Each of these individuals agreed to complete the required personal interview, and subsequently acted as ‘gate-keepers’, providing contact information or suggesting avenues by which to reach other club members and potential participants. Encouragingly, eight further participants were located as a result of these individual meetings. In total, thirteen youth (six males, and seven females) between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, as well as five leaders (two males, three females) between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-one, were enlisted to the study.

Naturally, the procedural adaptations discussed thus far had significant effect on the geographical sample under consideration, as well as the club ‘pool’ from which research was to draw. Rather than investigating a mere five 4-H and Junior Farmer clubs, participants spoke to their experiences in *dozens* of differing clubs. (Significantly, many participants were discovered to be members of more than one 4-H and/or Junior Farmers’ club.) Additionally, rather than promoting in-depth inquiry into the mooring of youth (via the forums of volunteer organizations) in five singular communities, the study was expanded to include leaders/executives and youth from more than twelve differing rural localities in Southern Ontario. As a result, demographic eligibility for selection shifted from considerations of the home-communities of various *clubs*, towards considerations of the places of residence of *youth* and *leaders themselves*. Accordingly, it was determined that study participants should reside within areas of population under approximately 5000 people (as previously illustrated), and in which significant land-base was dedicated to agricultural pursuits. Unquestionably and most basically, these individuals were also required to be current and active members of one or more 4-H and/or Junior Farmers’ clubs, and to be between the ages of 15 and 24 (as previously stated).

Once the interest of participants was established, semi-structured qualitative interviews were accordingly scheduled. In all cases, consent forms were read, discussed, and signed by participants (or their legal guardians) at the beginning of each interview meeting; however, most had received copies of the said document prior to that date. Interviews involving youth volunteers consisted of twenty-five questions following a semi-structured interview guide, while leader/executive member interviews were comprised of twenty-four questions in a similar style (see Appendices E-F). Conducted in private or semi-private settings as preferred by the interviewee, these sessions were recorded with a digital audio recording device, and lasted between approximately thirty and sixty minutes. Specifically, fourteen interviews were conducted in a home or private residence, four in designated club spaces, three in common areas on the University of Guelph campus, and one in a local coffee shop.

Semi-Structured Interviewing

Undoubtedly, the semi-structured interview is one of the most familiar and most frequently-employed forms of qualitative research (Berg, 2009; Qu & Dumay, 2011). This method of data collection is primarily organized according to a standardized set of interview questions; however, it is especially known for the adaptability of its format (Berg, 2009; Qu & Dumay, 2011). While the semi-structured interviewer aims to guide the interviewee according to a prescribed line of questioning, he/she also permits (and at times encourages) the conversation to extend into unique topics which are advanced in response to scheduled queries (Berg, 2009; Qu & Dumay, 2011). According to Berg (2009), “[t]he flexibility of the semistructured interview allow[s] the interviewers both to ask a series of regularly structured questions, permitting comparison across interviews, and to pursue areas spontaneously initiated by the interviewee. This result[s] in a much more textured set of accounts from participants than had

only scheduled questions been asked” (p. 109). Qu & Dumay (2011) concur that, “[b]ecause it has its basis in human conversation, [a semi-structured format] allows the skillful interviewer to modify the style, pace and ordering of questions to evoke the fullest responses from the interviewee” (p. 246). Perhaps most importantly, a semi-structured approach allows for adaptability of language - the modification of terms and phrasing - to ensure that questions are clear, relevant to the respondent, and mutually understood (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Thus, the interviewer and interviewee may be seen as co-creators of the interview experience, “producing questions and answers through a discourse of complex interpersonal talk” (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 247).

In this regard, Leyshon (2008) emphasizes a qualitative approach to, “research *with* young people in the belief that research is a shared process of knowledge creation between all those participating in the project, in whatever capacity” (p. 6); however, he stresses that in such situations, “the research is imbued with power-relations, particularly the adult-youth relationship” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 6). He urges, in this regard, that researchers discover ways in which to, “collaborate with young people and not exploit them”, by ensuring that they are removed from outside pressures and/or made comfortable in participation of their own volition (Leyshon, 2008). Unfortunately, the inability of the researcher to achieve pre-arranged visits to scheduled club meetings (at the outset of the study recruitment process) represents somewhat of a loss in this regard. Such visits would have provided a valuable opportunity to introduce the research (as well as the researcher) to youth, to field questions and address any concerns that young people may have had, and to generally establish a degree of rapport amongst potential participants. Nonetheless, this potential set-back, regarded from another perspective, makes the

semi-structured interview all the more valuable to the course of research, and to the progression of the subject-interviewer interaction.

Leyshon (2008) recommends that the practical research methods employed when studying rural young people, should aim to minimize social imbalances by, “provid[ing] young people with culturally credible ways of explaining their issues and concerns”, by developing, “mutual trust between researcher and research volunteers”, and by displaying, “a willingness to engage with young people on their own terms and in their own spaces” (Leyshon, 2008, p. 7). Arguably, the use of semi-structured interviewing allowed the researcher the opportunity to achieve each of these aims, over the course of the data collection process. In a spatial sense, youth were encouraged to select an interview location that would be comfortable to them, and that would provide a familiar environment - any travel over distance was expressly done gladly. A commitment was also consciously made in the mind of the researcher, to the use of physical signals which would add to the comfort of, and encourage ‘rapport’ with, young subjects upon meeting. Methods such as the maintenance of eye contact, smiling, nodding, and verbally acknowledging interviewee statements were considered crucial in setting participants at ease.

The flexibility of a semi-structured interview approach further allowed youth to ‘lead’ discussion, and to raise issues of their own delight or concern as they arose. While the interviewer was required to ‘re-direct’ the conversation at times, in maintaining commitment to particular themes or questions, a great many insights were gained by allowing for the freedom of youth in exploration of their own interests. Interviews certainly progressed in the manner of conversations; however, these conversations were singularly devoted to (and thereby implicitly valued) the life-experiences of the rural young person. In negotiating such mutual interaction, the researcher not only affirmed and clarified understanding of the colloquial terms and social

concepts employed by young people involved in 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs, but also learned of instances where the phrasing of interview questions was confusing or unclear to participants. At times, the language contained in interview questions was found to be inappropriate to the understanding of younger subjects; however, due to flexibility of inquiry, questions could be appropriately rephrased and discussed in further detail. In addition, the researcher often discovered instances in which topics/questions were addressed 'out of order', (that is, introduced independently by the interviewee, in sequences that were of personal relevance). While some skill was required on behalf of the researcher in these situations, to adeptly re-organize and maintain the natural 'flow' of the interview, such occurrences were decidedly affirming and encouraging to the research process.

Establishing the Positionality of the Researcher

At this juncture, it is necessary to establish the relative positionality of the researcher in relation to study subjects. In attempting to account for any impact that personal attributes may have had on the progression of interviews, several factors must indeed be acknowledged and considered. Most obvious is the researcher's status as an 'academic'. Many young people involved in this study had never before been exposed to the concept of social research, nor were they aware of the purpose of a 'Masters' thesis project' or what it entailed. At the outset of interviews, general apprehension was often either explicitly expressed, or was displayed in the behaviour of participants. Young people in particular shared common concerns of 'not having much to say', or not being able to 'give what was needed'. As a result, particular care was taken to de-mystify the research premise, and to explain the conceptual and practical motives behind the study. Youth were assured that their answers would not be judged or in any way evaluated, and were reminded that conversations would be kept confidential. Care was also taken to

explain to subjects how the study was relevant to their own lives – that the challenges and rewards they may have experienced as a rural person and volunteer were important, and that study participation would enable them to teach others about their unique ways of life.

Fortunately, certain other personal qualities possessed by the researcher may have worked to mediate the effects of this subject-interviewer power imbalance. As a young female, possessing only four to twelve years of age difference with youth subjects, interaction could more easily be conducted as a conversation among ‘peers’. While the researcher did make conscious effort to promote equality of interaction by speaking informally, avoiding the use of academic jargon, and projecting a relaxed attitude to participants, the adult-youth dichotomy was nevertheless organically dampened from the outset (Leyshon, 2008). In addition, the researchers’ position as a former 4-H and Junior Farmers’ member allowed for a certain ‘insider status’ to be imparted upon her by interviewees. At times, the researcher was explicitly asked by subjects whether or not she possessed relevant 4-H or Junior Farmers’ experience; in other instances, the researcher’s use of ‘club language’, specific references, or appropriate probes, led subjects to intuit that a rural club background was present. It is surmised that this ‘insider status’ served to facilitate the interview in three ways: Firstly, knowledge of the researcher’s club background allowed subjects to speak more ‘freely’, without concern for explaining the ‘finer details’ of club functioning and activities; Secondly, it allowed participants to feel that they had something ‘in common’ with the researcher - that they had somehow shared similar life experiences or interests; And thirdly, it absolved young people from concern of being ‘judged’ for their chosen activities of interest. (As will be related in the following ‘Discussion’ section, rural youth participants frequently cited a stereotyping of 4-H and JF clubs as ‘uncool’ or

‘backwards’, by outside friends and acquaintances.) Mutual group membership meant, for youth, that negative judgement from the interviewer would be much less likely.

Data Analysis

The basis for data analysis, within the context of this study, was largely informed by the tenets of ‘grounded theory’. According to Grbich (2009), this methodological approach appropriately, “locates the phenomena of human experiences within the world of social interaction. The assumptions underpinning grounded theory... presume that reality is a constructed and shifting entity and that social processes can be changed by interactions among people” (p. 71). Further, grounded theory emphasizes, “change, action and interaction in social settings and the construction of meaning within these setting through our reflections on both the phenomena and our own roles... [The] world is viewed as comprising many different layers, as well as public and private views” (Grbich, 2009, p. 71).

Charmaz (2004) further explicates the analytical practice of ‘grounded theory’, relating that such a method must be based upon, “(1) simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis phases of research, (2) creation of analytic codes and categories developed from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses, and (3) the development of middle-range theories to explain behavior and processes” (p. 497). Appropriately, the analysis of interview data, gleaned from rural youth and leaders, began well in advance of the completion of the interview process. While interview audio recordings were not fully transcribed into text, careful note-taking (completed both during and after the conclusion of interviews), allowed the researcher to progressively trace themes of interest, to highlight novel ideas for follow-up, and to elucidate parallels/contradictions between subject accounts over the course of weeks. Particular instances

of dialogue of specific interest or character were accordingly time-noted, for later verbatim review.

While several hypotheses for study had indeed been established, regarding the creation and sustenance of social capital within rural volunteer organizations, the researcher nonetheless sought to ascertain primary, “analytic categories directly from the data, not from [those] pre-conceived concepts” (Charmaz, 2004, p. 501). Efforts, in this regard, were focused toward allowing youth to ‘speak’ to their experiences, to illustrate issues of importance to them, and to personally ‘introduce’ categories for analysis to the researcher. As intuited above, a form of ‘open coding’ was continuously performed over the course of the early research, as smaller units of phrasing and dialogue were considered for their individual themes and subjects (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Following these pursuits towards general inquiry, a more ‘focused’ process of coding was adopted. According to Charmaz (2004), “[f]ocused coding refers to taking earlier codes that continually reappear in... initial coding and using those codes to sift through large amounts of data. Thus, focused coding is less open-ended and more directed... It is also considerably more selective and more conceptual” (p. 508). Thus, over the course of months and as a result of repeated listening-sessions, interview notes were indeed elaborated, contextualized, and evaluated for significant categories of experience. Ultimately, the obtained data (consisting of specific examples of experience or information, as well as informant-derived terminology and quotations), was manually sorted into an extensive data-matrix, and organized according to thematic code and the progression of interview questions. This matrix was indispensable to the apprehension of the data, and allowed for a comprehensive discussion of study results to follow.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

The following chapter serves to introduce the reader to the dynamic personalities of the rural youth volunteers and club leaders who so kindly participated in this research. Opening with a revisitation of the study sample, this section will briefly summarize relevant data related to indicators such as gender, age, socio-economic status, and club-enrollment. Following the directionality of the 'Theory & Literature Review', it will further delve into the unique world-views of rural Ontarian youth, by illuminating volunteers' perceptions of 'rurality' and rural identity. Consideration will be given to the manner in which youth respondents described the physicality of the rural landscape, the morality of rural-dwellers, and the social-physical criterion by which they located themselves as 'rural' persons. Following this exploratory discussion, attention will shift to the primary focus of the current research - to the formation of social capital within the forums of rural volunteer organizations. In specific, the latter part of this chapter will be devoted to the identification and evaluation of the overt 'bonding' and 'bridging' opportunities available within 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs. Relevant activities will be discussed in relation to three youth-centred 'spheres of interaction', namely: that of the youth-leader relationship (in the case of 4-H) and the youth-executive relationship (in the case of JF), that of local club meetings and activities, and that of provincial and national events.

Sample Overview

As previously outlined, the research sample for this study consisted of eighteen participants, including thirteen youth volunteers/club members aged 16-24, and five 4-H leaders/Junior Farmers executive members, aged 25-51. Amongst youth subjects, the gender

distribution was well-balanced, with six being male and seven being female. When sub-divided by age, four of these individuals were between 16 and 18 years old, five were between 19 and 21 years old, and four were between the ages of 22 and 24. The youth leaders/executive members were equally balanced by gender, with two being male and three being female; however, their age ranges varied quite considerably. Three of the leaders were between the ages of 25 and 35, and two were over the age of 51.

Together, study subjects represented four counties within Southern Ontario. Of involved youth, one resided within Peel Region, one within Waterloo county, two within Oxford County, and eight within Wellington County. Four of the involved leaders/executive members resided in Wellington County, and one leader resided in Peel. Within these four counties, subjects hailed from more than twelve differing villages, towns, and rural and agricultural areas. Each participant indicated that they had spent the duration of their lives within a rural area or small town, with the exception of two youths whose families had in-migrated from urban areas. Notably, two young people indicated that they were ‘first-generation’ Canadian, while a third indicated having immigrated to Canada as a child. Nonetheless, the ethnicity of study subjects was overwhelmingly homogeneous, with the vast majority of participants being of European descent. Only one participant represented a visible minority, being of South-Asian heritage.

Of the thirteen youth involved in this study, nine were currently residing within farming households. Several lived on dairy and beef farms, while others indicated family specializations in horses, pigs, sheep, cow-calf operations, and cash-cropping. Two had grown up on dairy farms which had since been sold. Of the nine youth residing on-farm, three indicated that their parents had also pursued off-farm employment, in sectors such as food processing, construction, government administration, and healthcare. Of the five leaders/executive members interviewed,

four were living on farms of various specialization (two of these individuals had also pursued outside professional careers), and one was employed in metal working. Encouragingly, each of the youth participants had completed, or was nearing completion of their high-school education. Of those who had already graduated, seven were pursuing some form of post-secondary education, and four were employed in family farming ventures or agriculture-related industry.

Club Membership

Of the thirteen youth interviewed, four were active members of 4-H Ontario, five were active members of the Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario, and four reported current membership in both organizations. (Interestingly, of the five participants who were active in Junior Farmers only, four had had prior experience with 4-H; however, they were not enrolled in 4-H clubs for that particular year.) Thus, in total, nine out of thirteen youth could speak to personal experience in JFAO, and a subsequent twelve out of thirteen young people could speak to personal experience in 4-H clubs. Of the adults involved in this study, three were 4-H club leaders (two females and one male), and two were Junior Farmer executive members (one female and one male).

Notably, each of the Junior Farmers' clubs under examination, as represented by interview subjects, was loosely organized according to county boundaries (representing Peel, Oxford, and Wellington Counties). Two young people indicated that they had been involved in efforts to form clubs encompassing smaller, more geographically-focused, regions; however, these clubs had been unable to solicit adequate membership. Youth with 4-H experience indicated that they had been involved in an extensive variety of clubs dedicated to differing topics. Amongst livestock-related clubs were: 'Dairy', 'Beef', 'Sheep', 'Swine', 'Donkey',

‘Alpaca’, ‘Poultry’, ‘Rabbit’, ‘Heavy Horse’, ‘Goat’, ‘Veterinary Club’ and ‘Domestic Pets’. ‘Field Crop’, ‘Competitive Ploughing’, ‘Farm Machinery’, and ‘Tractor Restoration’ clubs were also reported. Participants additionally spoke to experience in what have traditionally been considered ‘homecraft’ clubs: ‘Cooking’, ‘Sewing’, ‘Baking’, ‘Pie-Making’, ‘Crocheting’, and ‘Etiquette’. The greatest diversity in club-topics was to be found under what may be considered ‘special interest’ clubs, in which youth participated in ‘Square-Dancing’, ‘Scrapbooking’, ‘Heritage Photography’, ‘Drama & Theatre’, ‘Clowning’, ‘Life-Skills’, ‘LEGO Building’, ‘Woodworking’, ‘Painting & Fine Art’, ‘Mountain Biking’, ‘Local Foods’, and ‘Travel/Exchange’ clubs, among others. Participants typically expressed having been involved in at least two 4-H clubs over the course of any given year, with some achieving the completion of several clubs annually.

Not surprisingly, 4-H club achievement remained somewhat gendered within the study sample. Of the five young men with 4-H experience, each indicated completion of traditionally more ‘masculine’ livestock clubs, including ‘Swine’, ‘Dairy’, ‘Beef’, ‘Poultry’ and ‘Rabbit’. Encouragingly, six out of the seven females had *also* participated in livestock clubs, in the spheres of ‘Dairy’, ‘Beef’, ‘Sheep’, ‘Donkey’, and others. ‘Homecraft’ clubs, nonetheless, appeared to remain primarily within the domain of young women. Four of the seven females with 4-H experience had completed clubs with a domestic focus, under themes such as ‘Cooking’, ‘Baking’, and ‘Sewing’, while only two of five males acknowledged similar achievements. Nine of these twelve individuals (of both genders) acknowledged having participated in ‘special interest’ clubs of varied focus.

Interestingly, pathways of introduction to 4-H and JFAO amongst young people were multiple. In all but one instance, youth subjects were inspired and/or encouraged to pursue

membership through several sources. In the case of 4-Hers, eight youth had parents who were prior members or leaders of clubs, seven had (generally older) siblings who had been members, and five indicated that they had friends who had also introduced them to 4-H clubs. One individual's family had recently migrated into the rural community, and was invited to join by a neighbouring 4-H leader. In regards to Junior Farmers, only three youth indicated that their parents had been prior members. Instead, the main pathways to membership were siblings (for six of the involved youth) and friends (for five of the involved youth). Of the 4-H leaders interviewed, each had been a regular club member during their own youth. In the case of the Junior Farmer executive members, both expressed having been introduced to the club through involved friends.

A Biography of Rural Ontarian Youth: Exploring Local Identities

In keeping with the established aims of this study, the following section will broaden focus in order to explore the multi-faceted meanings that young Ontarians attribute to 'rural' identity. Reflective of the prior literature review, discussion will center upon rural youth volunteers' considerations of the physical and social aspects of 'rurality' (both positive and negative), as well as their views on the unique qualities and attributes of rural life. Further investigation will illuminate the criterion by which youth subjects have defined their own identities within the rural landscape of Southern Ontario, and will highlight expressed difficulties of 'self-realization' in a social environment in which 'rural' and 'urban' lifestyles increasingly intersect.

Reflections of the Rural Landscape

Within the context of this study, youth identified geographical characteristics as amongst the most prominent identifiers of the 'rural' landscape. Indeed, when solicited to share personal impressions of the meaning of the word 'rural', ten out of twelve youth commenced with descriptors of physical locality. In these cases, 'rurality' was generally associated with areas of low population and wide distribution, 'dirt roads' or 'back roads', and open spaces in which to pursue recreation and leisure activities. Six of the twelve youth identified the rural as being 'close to nature', encompassing 'simple and natural' associations with the 'land', 'trees and wildlife', and 'the outdoors'. Three youth further identified rural spaces as relatively unpolluted, characterized by 'fresh air' and minimal amounts of vehicle traffic. Not surprisingly, a significant majority (eight out of twelve youth), also identified the presence of 'agriculture' and 'farming' as central geo-physical features.

While views of 'urbanity' were not directly solicited from youth during the interview process, in keeping with the results of Leyshon (2008), Gabriel (2006), and Malatest & Associates (2002), subjects nevertheless utilized their impressions of urban centers as powerful comparative tools by which to juxtapose the rural. Opinions on urban infrastructure, when given, were unanimously negative. Four youth noted their distaste for urban environments, citing them to be 'unnatural', lacking in animals and wildlife, and riddled with 'junk', 'pollution', and 'heavy traffic'. Four further youth expressed concern for continuing urban expansion in Southern Ontario, citing the 'claustrophobia' of closely spaced dwellings, which seemed to be ever-encroaching on rural settings. According to one young woman, urbanization was "destroying land". Another expressed, "the more people that come, the more houses that come. The more houses that come, the less farms that [survive]".

Comparatively, appropriations of rural localities themselves were largely positive, and indeed reflective of the ‘rural idyll’ of previous note (Cloke, 2006; Leyshon, 2008; Rye, 2006). Nonetheless, a full half of youth subjects also identified certain challenges associated with rural localities. Rural areas were generally considered to be ‘far from amenities’, with a lack of convenient access to groceries and other staples, long bus rides to school, and significant distances between friends and neighbours. Youth also cited difficulties in relation to the lack of accessible transportation in rural centers, which often necessitated ‘getting a drive’ from family members or friends who possessed vehicles. As a result, socializing with peers often required significant planning, with pre-arranged meeting places, and adequate time allowed for travel. One young person also cited difficulties associated with inclement weather in rural areas, as snow-removal services (and therefore excursions) were often delayed. Interestingly, despite these admitted drawbacks, youth did not express instances of conflict of over the use and enjoyment of local space, as noted by previous authors (Meek, 2008, p. 129).

Reflections on Social Interaction

Encouragingly, youth participants also readily advocated a belief that, “[rurality] is not necessarily about a particular place, it’s about how you treat each other”. Feedback regarding social interaction within rural communities was overwhelmingly positive, with eight out of twelve respondents identifying ‘cooperation’ as a defining characteristic of rural spaces. These young people expressed an overall sense of being able to rely upon their neighbours and peers, with such exclamations as, “the door is always open no matter where you go”. Related to this concept was the idea that rural people possessed a sense of responsibility for the welfare of their peers - “you care for your neighbours... you look out for one another”. According to one female respondent, “even though [our neighbours are] not as close as city neighbours, I bet you that

we're a lot closer as people". Accordingly, several youth shared impressions that rural people are likely to both socialize and work within the same interpersonal circles. 'Cooperation' thus involved diverse aspects of residents' lives - from planning social events and sharing transportation and childcare, to soliciting extra manpower for physical work or borrowing farm equipment.

Subsequent responses regarding the social attributes of rural areas were somewhat less cohesive. Six of the involved youth identified particular personality traits which they believed to be characteristic of rural residents, which included descriptors such as 'friendly', 'relaxed', 'down-to-earth' and 'inviting'. Three youth emphatically ascribed a strong work-ethic to rural dwellers, within the diverse forums of local fundraisers, community events, and farm work or employment. Six youth expressed a sense of local familiarity and dense acquaintanceship amongst rural dwellers, believing that, 'everybody knows everybody', or that, "you can wave to everyone... [and] know who drives what vehicle, what colour tractor". And finally, three young individuals expressed a salient sense of local pride and heritage within rural areas, believing that agricultural activities were the, "building blocks of [Canadian] society... when the country was brand new, everyone was a farmer".

Here again, rural social connectivity was upheld as comparatively superior to that of urban communities. Five of the thirteen youth reasoned that urban interactions were characterized by a lack of valuable cooperation – that urbanites may live in close proximity to one another, but do not 'live together', and may not necessarily 'know their neighbours'. One youth expressed, "the way they think is... something completely different. They think a lot for themselves, and you know, they don't really want to connect with *everybody*... They kinda wanna keep to themselves". Associated with this concept was an impression that urban youth

were not socialized within the 'positive' boundaries of the family - that they spent 'more time with peers', had less respect for their parents, and were missing life lessons from elders. While several youth expressed such views, notably only one ascribed any particular delinquent activity to urban young people. In this case, the young man reasoned that urban youth did not possess sufficient positive activities or influences to 'keep them occupied', and thus were more likely to get involved with drugs and other troublesome activities.

In stark contrast to the preceding literature review, negative views of social interaction within rural communities were almost entirely absent from discussion. Aside from expressed difficulties in socializing due to limited transportation, only two young women noted additional challenges or concerns. One explicated the social frustrations of rural life in relation to farm-work, noting that plans to visit friends or attend parties could easily be interrupted due to emergencies (medical concerns, livestock birthing, power outages, etc.) at home. The other, quite separately, commented briefly on the challenges of upholding an established 'family name' or reputation within limited interactional circles. Incredibly, concerns for gossip, persistent labelling, racism, and 'ageism' in rural communities, as forewarned in the works of Corbett (2005), Meek (2008), Haugen & Villa (2006) and Leyshon (2008), were essentially absent from commentary.

Constructing Rural Identities

As has been demonstrated, youths' views regarding the physical and social components of the 'rural' landscape were fairly consistent across interview participants. Perhaps more importantly, youths' individual claims to a 'rural identity' were equally consistent. Of the thirteen youth interviewed, twelve declared that they did indeed consider themselves to be 'rural'

individuals. In describing the criterion by which they ‘legitimized’ such a claim, several commonalities were noted (Leyshon, 2008). The first and foremost indicator of ‘rural status’, quite unsurprisingly, was related to location of residence. While two respondents declared ‘living on a farm’ to be a mandatory to an ‘authentic’ rural identity (naturally, both of these young people resided on-farm), the remaining eleven youth assigned more flexible geographical prerequisites. These participants generally agreed that rural status (physically-speaking) derived from living in the proximity of ‘back roads’, ‘open land’, and ‘low population’ (as noted in the preceding section); therefore, whether an individual lived on a farm or whether in a small town or village, they could potentially claim ‘rural’ status.

Undoubtedly, for those youth who *did* reside on-farm, agricultural knowledge and activities represented a significant component of rural identity. Six out of the nine ‘on-farm’ youth believed themselves to be in possession of a unique body of wisdom, derived from a ‘connection with the land’ and ‘contact with animals’. This knowledge, in turn, granted them what they believed to be a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the world around them. Youth subjects frequently expressed that non-rural and/or urban people possessed little understanding of farming, or specifically the animals, crops, and systems of food production which are central to North American life. One young woman characterized these sentiments by stating that, “agricultural knowledge should be basic, but it’s not for many people... City people are not less intelligent, but they know less about the basics”. Quite interestingly, another individual claimed that such discrepancies in knowledge required rural youth to be more adaptable to external social circumstances – “we know more about society in general, because we know how to act in the country, [but] we also know how to act in town”.

In addition to the more obvious criteria of residential location and agricultural activity, youth also apprehended a “moral geography of the countryside” by which they defined personal membership within rural areas (Leyshon, 2008, p.22). In particular, in fashioning themselves as ‘responsible’, ‘hard-working’, and ‘socially-involved’, youth displayed an adherence to the perceived social traditions of the rural community, and ascribed to themselves an active role in the continuity of those traditions (Leyshon, 2008). Indeed, according to several young people, a major part of rural identity involved embracing cooperation by ‘volunteering for fun’ or accepting ‘volunteering as a way of life’. Here again, rural youth were compared to urban youth - “rural kids did a lot of volunteering before they *had* to. To fill the forty hours [of community service required for high-school completion in Ontario] wasn’t difficult in *one* year, versus a lot of the city kids that had to do it in four or five [years]”. Related to this concept was youths’ self-ascribed status as more ‘hardworking’ and ‘responsible’ than their urban counterparts. Half of all youth interviewed indicated that they embraced what they considered to be significant responsibility at home, in relation to farm chores, care for animals, and general household duties. Here again, urban youth were seen as absolved from such responsibility, and comments in this regard could be quite caustic. One rural youth noted, “[city kids] wouldn’t have anything major to do but clean their room... waited for their allowance to come in every week... didn’t actually have to work for it”. Another exclaimed, “all hell breaks loose if someone [urban] has to clean the kitty litter”.

The Creation of Social Capital within 4-H and Junior Farmers Clubs

In line with the established aims of this study, analysis will proceed with an investigation into the concrete and observable methods by which 4-H and Junior Farmers clubs may serve to increase social capital in rural communities – into those interactional pathways which allow for

youths' involvement in face-to-face interactions and/or the completion of shared activities across varied social groups (Putnam, 1995). In order to achieve this objective, discussion will highlight those events and occurrences which have allowed youth volunteers to be active participants within their various communities, and to engage in interpersonal communication and cooperation across generations. Relevant activities, events, and directives of the 4-H and Junior Farmers clubs (as related by both youth volunteers and leaders/executive members) will be noted, and further evaluated according to the 'bonding' and 'bridging' opportunities provided.

'Bonding & Bridging': 4-H Ontario

Leaders as Gatekeepers

Previous authors have emphasized the presence and dedication of 4-H leaders as the most singularly important force in the creation and sustenance of the 4-H organization across the country (Cormack, 1971; Lee, 1995). The results of this study have unquestionably supported these assertions, and participants have repeatedly made clear the instrumental role of adult leaders in the creation and progression of 4-H club opportunities for youth. Notwithstanding their extensive planning and administrative capacities, 4-H leaders were portrayed as 'social enablers', who provided a broad spectrum of knowledge, support, and socio-physical resources to young people. The following sub-section outlines the practical aspects of leaders' efforts to organize and program youth activities, as well as their facilitation of social opportunity through the 'gathering' of young people.

Undoubtedly, it is 4-H leaders who assume responsibility for the seasonal continuation of local clubs. On a most basic level, leaders indicated being tasked with scheduling initial club meetings, arranging the needed meeting spaces (often within their own homes), and obtaining or

creating anew the required plans for topic instruction. Prior to the initiation of any club, leaders must have obtained certification through the 4-H organization, by completing instructional courses within their area of interest. According to respondents, these courses were to be renewed every two years, and were expressly useful in keeping up-to-date with new ideas, procedures, and instructional materials. Any new clubs had to be submitted by leaders to the 4-H Ontario organization for approval, via written proposal and in a prescribed format. Beyond these tasks, additional responsibilities were reported to include: soliciting and/or purchasing needed tools and materials (such as fabric and quilt-batten for Quilting Clubs, or lead-halters for Livestock Clubs); overseeing financial accounts and moneys-earned through fundraisers and by donation; booking venues for field-trips and arranging guest-speakers; and observing legal procedure to safeguard the well-being of members during such activities. Interestingly, multiple youth within the sample related that leaders had gone ‘above and beyond’ these basic expectations, providing such favours as transportation to and from meetings when parents were unable to do so, or granting reference letters for jobs and educational scholarships.

Perhaps more significantly, study participants also spoke of 4-H leaders’ duties as ‘instructors’ within the club sphere. Reminiscent of a traditional classroom setting, leaders conveyed the complexities of imparting practical and useful skills upon young people, while at the same time “keeping them in line” and, of course, “having fun”. Certain youth noted unique challenges for their leaders in this regard, given the potentially wide age-range of club members (anywhere from eight to twenty-one years). They recognized leaders’ abilities to engage older members, while simultaneously maintaining the attention and entertainment of their much younger counterparts. One expressed that, “leaders have to learn how to deal with different age groups... how to make it, uhh, a challenge for older ones to keep them interested”. Another

shared his belief that 4-H leaders, “create the fun... they know the kids well and how to get them excited”.

Not surprisingly, leaders often spoke about the teacher-pupil experience as ‘emotionally-involved’; as a personal investment, characterized by a “sharing of things I know, and [of] things I have”. Each spoke to the centrality of, “spending time with the kids”, providing them with “reinforcement”, “reassurance”, and “support”, and at times even offering “a shoulder to cry on if certain attempts don’t work out”. Youth confirmed the emotional responsiveness of leaders in early conversation, intimating significant trust in leaders’ ability to ease them comfortably into new experiences, and in their leaders’ expertise within the topics and activities underway. 4-Hers displayed a deep admiration for their mentors, paying such tributes as: “[this individual] is a really good friend, and has been there for everything. Like if I ever need help or something, *anything* - even if it’s not 4-H related”; “If there’s something she can’t do [at the outset of a club], she’ll just do it anyway. And that’s pretty much the 4-H motto, *Learn To Do By Doing*... She doesn’t just try new things, she masters them!”; and finally, “[*insert name*] literally can do anything... [they’re] a huge part of this community, and keeping it together”.

‘Internal’ Skill Development: Local Club Meetings & Activities

Undoubtedly, another important sphere of 4-H club interaction occurs within the context of central meetings and activities. As will be seen, the physical composition and recreational schedule of these clubs provides a number of further interactional opportunities for members. At a most basic level, club meetings serve to bring together local children and youth, who may not otherwise have the opportunity to meet. In several cases, 4-H participants indicated that they did not live a great distance from fellow ‘clubbers’, but that had not previously been acquainted with

them due to the separation of school catchments. In the words of one young male respondent, “[y]ou meet so many cool people... You build, kinda, friendships that are just amazing. I met my best friend through 4-H!” Another indicated that, “the friends I have now are not the friends I had in public school... I have my 4-H, and umm, country friends. Town kids stick together and 4-Hers stick together.” A further young woman, aged 22-24, stressed very highly the role that attendance at local 4-H meetings played in her ability to make new friends after moving into the area.

Perhaps more significantly, the structure of 4-H clubs requires youth not only to be in the same vicinity as their peers (ie. attending the same meetings and events), but also to be actively working together to fulfill organizational requirements. This necessity for active collaboration was most evident in the employment of ‘rules of order’ during the course of 4-H meetings, and in the nominating and electing of members to various ‘executive positions’ within the club. As has been previously explicated, 4-Hers must be available to the possibility of being ‘nominated’ by their peers and standing for such roles as Club President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Press-Reporter and others. Youth participants indicated that they may not be elected to an executive position in *every* completed club; however, they shared an expectation that members would attempt and trade various positions amongst themselves over time. Of the 4-Hers involved in this study, each had assumed at least one position throughout course of their 4-H involvement. A number of youth (six out of twelve respondents with 4-H experience) had held at least three executive positions over the course of various clubs, and a further four individuals indicated having held *all* available positions in different instances. According to one respondent, “as much as you tell yourself you’re not going to take on too much, or take on an executive position [at all], you always find yourself doing something. No one else wants to do it

sometimes, so you pick up the slack. Of course [laughs], leaders can be pretty good at appointing people to positions”. While the required duties for each position were generally explicated by leaders at the outset of each club, youth expressed that they were equally as likely to learn about required tasks from peers with prior club experience. One young man shared that, “you kinda have to learn how to lead and show by example, especially as a senior member... learn how to keep everybody on track and moving forward... [and how to] learn from mistakes”. This sharing also appeared to extend to the completion of club projects, as more experienced clubbers often mentioned assuming responsibility for helping younger members in activities including: clipping and showing livestock, public speaking, stitching, carpentering, acting, and cooking.

A further interactional component to 4-H meetings was shown to be the intermittent presence of guest speakers and instructors within the club environment. Leaders and youth respondents alike identified several instances in which individuals with external knowledge and skills had been invited to participate in club proceedings. Specifically, study respondents acknowledged the contributions of elderly residents who would attend dress-rehearsals of plays and dramatizations, parents and neighbours who would assist youth in learning about the handling of animals, representatives from local Women’s Institutes who would appraise sewing and cooking projects, and a nearby church member who aided in the instruction of knitting. In most cases, these interactions were coordinated at leaders’ homes, community halls, or other routinely-utilized premises; however, at times, meetings were moved to the locale of the hosts themselves. This was the case for such interactions as farms tours, trips to the local Humane Society, attendance at a community quilting bee, volunteer visits to old-age homes, and behind-the-scenes tours with regional drama groups.

Expanded Horizons: Provincial & National Events

The largest and most extensive sphere of interaction encountered by 4-Hers is undoubtedly the result of club participation in a variety of county-wide, provincial, and national events. Clubs represented within the study sample were indeed involved in a multitude of 4-H associated initiatives, including locally-based fairs and fundraisers, regional livestock shows and skill-based competitions, as well as national and international exchange opportunities. While the experiences and opportunities afforded to any one member varied significantly, each young person indicated having participated in some form of wider community event as a representative 4-H member. Often, youth referred to the existence of a ‘home’ fair – a fair hosted in a neighbouring community at which (depending on the time of year) members could participate in multiple capacities. Those enrolled in livestock clubs emphasized animal shows as main club events; others had completed displays featuring completed club projects and creations. According to youth, fair experiences allowed them to make connections with people outside of the club domain, as they were prompted by leaders and organizers to interact with visitors, to answer questions, and to speak about their most recent projects. Youth subjects firmly asserted that such interactions had served to build their communication skills, teaching them how to interact with new and diverse people, how to ‘read’ and interpret others’ intentions, and how to share their knowledge with others who might know little of 4-H and its purpose.

In addition, several of the youth indicated that they had volunteered time, on behalf of the club, in order to help with the successful running of local fairs. Efforts included setting up booths, manning food stations for charitable causes, and helping with maintenance and clean-up. Other local/regional causes adopted by 4-Hers included contributions to garbage collections, car washes, gate-duties at local truck and tractor pulls, the conduction of educational ‘activity tables’

for children, and the serving of food at community meals and barbeques. As a result of these situations, youth seemed to have knowingly acquired opportunities to network with other volunteers, of all ages and community/club backgrounds. One female respondent clearly acknowledged the importance of working with others towards a collective purpose, sharing that, “I just find... volunteer people and ‘country’ people are, they’re just easier to get along with... There’s just that connection. Just the fact that they’re in the same club, or they are volunteering”. Another related, “[i]n volunteering everybody is on the same, you know, boat... Everybody’s there for the same reason - same outcome. And everybody understands and respects why you’re there”.

Beyond the local geographic vicinity, 4-Hers are also offered the opportunity to participate in a number of other regionally-based, provincial, and national events. For the subjects involved in this study, such events included: taking winning livestock to fairs and shows beyond the immediate area, entering regional judging competitions (focusing on crops, livestock, and other homemade creations), and forwarding a team to the provincial ‘Go For The Gold’ competition (a ‘Jeopardy’-style quiz challenge). While only one of the interviewed youth had completed an exchange trip through the national 4-H Canada organization (as discussed in the ‘Background to Study’), several were aware of friends or acquaintances who had undertaken such travel. From the express viewpoint of leaders, regional and provincial events served to teach 4-Hers the value of ‘independence’, ‘sportsmanship’ and ‘friendly competition’. Youth seemed to be generally aware of these conduct-related expectations, and of their responsibility to act as positive ‘ambassadors’ for their local clubs in such situations. As one young man exclaimed, “there are both ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ rules in the club, and certain expectations [of behaviour] that apply to everybody”. Others noted the value of exchanging new ideas with

peers from other regions, and of returning them to the group: “You learn a lot from other people’s interests and achievement day projects, things you wouldn’t have been exposed to. At first I didn’t like doing achievement stuff, but in the end it was for the best, I guess”. Youth also reported having made occasional ‘bridging’ connections with non-club adults, as representatives from provincial industries (generally agricultural) and local politicians tended to be present as sponsors. Nevertheless, youths’ favourite subject of discussion, bar none, was the many new bonds of friendship that they had acquired further afield. According to one female respondent, “I love the connections... People ask me – ‘how do you know so many people?’”; another relates, “People I meet at events probably have the same story as me, and I’ve seen them in lots of different places... I guess that’s why some of my best friends are from 4-H”; and again, “you meet friends that are with you forever”.

‘Bonding & Bridging’: Junior Farmers’ Association of Ontario

Peers as Role-Models

As this account turns to focus upon the Junior Farmers’ Association of Ontario, and an appraisal of the networking opportunities it provides to youth, it is appropriate to note the unique relationship that the club shares with its fellow organization. According to the responses of study participants, Junior Farmers and 4-H clubs often possess a seemingly ‘symbiotic’ relationship in regards to recruitment and club structure. As the allowable age-ranges for each of the clubs overlap considerably (ages eight to twenty-one, and fifteen to twenty-nine, for 4-H and Junior Farmers, respectively), young people may be afforded the opportunity for concurrent involvement in both clubs. Five of this study’s youth reported that they were active members of Junior Farmers, while another four accordingly reported current membership in both

organizations. Further to this point, seven of the aforementioned JF'ers (and two of the three interviewed executive members) reported having begun their rural volunteer involvement with 4-H, later transitioning into the Junior Farmers' sphere.

According to one regular member and two of the executive members, this development is somewhat deliberate - Junior Farmers' clubs often attempt to recruit from local 4-H clubs, through the soliciting of member email lists, the presence of JF information booths at 4-H-attended events, and the mailing of pamphlets to 4-H households. Nonetheless, for the vast majority of respondents, the transition into Junior Farmers was facilitated and encouraged by peers with previous club experience. As noted in the 'Sample Overview', the main pathways to JF membership were siblings (for six of the involved youth) and friends (for five of the involved youth). One quite insightful young man explained that Junior Farmers' is, "like the next step... If you're in one [4-H], you need to be in the other [JF]... It's easy to spark up conversation, and people always ask - 'how do you get into that?'... Sometimes it's hard to bring out new members, but when they come they'll never turn around, [and] they'll always bring friends".

This organizational symbiosis is further reflected in the composition and club structure of the JFAO. As has been discussed at length, 4-H clubs require the active contribution of young members - the mastering of skills and the learning of due process in relation to the successful conduction of meetings, the maintenance of financial viability, and the organization of projects. Junior Farmers clubs carry these practical requirements forward, with one notable alteration - the absence of 'adult' members to supervise overarching proceedings. In order to qualify as a 'legitimate' club, youth themselves must ensure the completion of tasks such as: 'completing a community betterment project'; 'completing a joint youth activity, conservation project, or an agricultural education activity'; 'having at least one event reported on by television, radio or

print media’; ‘devoting meeting-time to the structure and purpose of JFAO and effective meeting procedures’; and ‘submitting copies of official minutes’ (‘JFAO 2012 Annual Report’, JFAO, 2013, p. 3). Thus, within the Junior Farmers’ mandate, the onus for scheduling and time-management, social networking, event planning, and solicitations, is placed squarely on young shoulders. Characteristically explained by one interviewee, “[w]ith Junior Farmers, you’re working at a more senior level”.

‘Internal’ Skill Development: Local Club Meetings & Activities

Interestingly, general members spoke very little about the proceedings of Junior Farmer meetings during interviews. A couple of youth went so far as to indicate that, “the meetings are the boring part of things” and, “it’s the part in the parking lot after, staying late and talking [that is important]”. As a result, insights into routine procedure were typically gleaned from senior members occupying executive positions. Depending on the membership rates of particular clubs, as well as expectations for attendance, Junior Farmers meetings could reportedly occur in any number of public and/or community spaces, from larger community halls to smaller churches and restaurants. Agendas were largely directed by the executive, with social and financial briefings, motions for voting, club news, and other topics introduced by the President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary, as well as various Directors/Representatives for ‘Recreation & Sports’, ‘Community Betterment’, ‘Media & Public Relations’ and other areas. These executives were also responsible to act as liaisons and points-of-contact for outside community members with whom the club wished to establish ties.

Ensuring member attendance at regular meetings was professed to be a unique challenge for executives - individual participation was not ‘required’ or monitored to the same degree as

within 4-H clubs, and older youth were increasingly required to balanced club-time with work/school responsibilities and external socializing. To this point, one young JF-er expressed, “I’m not complainin’ I guess, but it seems like every night there’s something to do... It’s generally worth it, but sometimes meetings get long and homework time gets shortened”. Another exclaimed, ‘tongue-in-cheek’, “[i]t’s not fair that we have to have jobs that limit what we can do!”. Likely due to the challenges of attendance and competing time-commitments, each of the Junior Farmers clubs in the sample had been organized along geographically-widened ‘county’ boundaries. Two general members indicated that they had attempted to establish independent clubs within smaller territories, but had not been successful due to low attendance rates. It was thus inferred that Junior Farmers clubs had been most viable where they had ‘cast a wide net’, maximizing the rural demographic from which to draw membership.

Encouragingly, Junior Farmers’ clubs appeared to have greater success outside the scope of meetings, in the scheduling of entertainment opportunities for youth. According to respondents, a significant part of any JF club’s purpose was to provide members with the opportunity for social interaction and fun. Youth referred repeatedly to Junior Farmers’ events as a “good way to pass the time”, and as “something positive to do” together. Member-exclusive events such as snow-tubing, barbeques, beach days, bonfires, and hockey and curling games, were intended to bring youth together from various reaches of the county, and - according to respondents - to break down group barriers in a relaxed atmosphere. Quite simply, “instead of talking about stuff you did at school, you talk about farming and just, life! You can learn a lot about people, and why they do what they do”. Another spoke about the inclusive nature of these get-togethers, “fifteen or thirty [years of age], they’re the same person, and the opportunities are the same”. Yet another general member promoted the advantages of, “seeing people and

recognizing faces... Even if you haven't met them yet, you already know you have something in common".

Beyond such 'member-based' interactions, Junior Farmers' clubs were also mandated to promote local volunteerism through various community outreach initiatives. Individual clubs exercised a significant degree of self-determinism in this regard, as evidenced by the multitude of local projects discussed by interviewees. These activities included: euchre tournaments with senior citizens, clean-up at parks and on highways, food booths at fairs, cooking and bartending for community parties, food bank drives, carwashes, the planning and execution of local car rallies and tractor pulls, directing traffic and parking cars at local events, and other miscellaneous duties as requested by regional branches of the Rotary Club, Cancer Society, and other associations. Executives relayed that recruitment for these events was often challenging, due to the scheduling concerns of members; however, based on youth interviews, Junior Farmers felt quite keenly about the tasks that had been requested of them – "sometimes you'd be doing something that you wouldn't really think was like, 'fun', I guess. Like picking up garbage [laughs], but together you'd *make* it fun". Others indicated a sense of pride in the independence and motivation of their peers - "[k]nowing that you and your group of friends is contributing to the community in a positive way, it's just... it's great".

Undoubtedly, the formation of strong emotional and collegial bonds between Junior Farmers emerged as a central outcome of such local and regional activities. Each of the involved participants lauded JF involvement as an opportunity to make new acquaintances, and to build and strengthen friendships within a general atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration. Appropriately stated, "the more volunteering you do, even if it's the same volunteering all the time, the more people you're going to meet". Not surprisingly, youth also learned that teamwork

and collaboration required significant effort - nearly all members could recall instances of interactional difficulty or disagreement during the conduction of club tasks. Four interviewees specifically admitted to cases of, “dealing with people that you’d sometimes rather not deal with” (both within and without of the club), of ‘adding more stress to times that are already stressful’, or being involved in conflicts – “if you’re in a group and not everyone is willing to do the same amount of work, that’s what gets to be a challenge”. Younger clubbers emphasized the availability of executive members in dealing with such challenges, reportedly looking to their elders for guidance in communication and conflict resolution. In fact, Junior Farmers’ general members showed a great deal of admiration for executives, citing them as individuals who: ‘were willing to help out other members’, ‘encouraged others to get out and get together’, ‘viewed all members as equal regardless of their age’, ‘knew where to go for contacts and information’, and generally ‘passed along the spirit of what the club was all about’. As characterized by one respondent, “Junior Farmer ‘execs will give you your space to work, but if you need a helping hand, they’ll be there”.

Expanded Horizons: Provincial & National Events

As with the 4-H organization, extensive opportunities for interaction amongst Junior Farmers were provided through scheduled provincial and national events. While respondents devoted significantly less interview-time to speaking about such large-scale meets (in favour of member-based and local/regional initiatives), these events were nonetheless assigned an important role in the continuity of the Junior Farmers’ Association of Ontario. Unique to the interview responses of Junior Farmers was a spirit of independence and initiative in relation to such gatherings. Members were certainly urged to attend external events by more experienced clubbers and executives – “the ‘execs convince you pretty easily, which events you must go to...

once in a lifetime or once in a year!"; however, the responsibility to maximize the social and intellectual benefit of such experiences remained with the individual. According to involved youth, it was up to members to determine "how many people they want[ed] to meet", which sessions to experience, and how closely to attend to educational opportunities and resources for future use.

The overwhelming spirit of these events, as conveyed by interview respondents, was unquestionably one of lively exchange and excitement - "[y]ou're at Junior Farmer events and it's just a blast... Everything in Junior Farmers is *so much fun*, from... the events, to the social gatherings too, the provincial activities, everything!". One young man joked, "[t]hey say that Junior Farmers' is the best match-making service in Ontario!". Certain of the events discussed by interviewees, such as Junior Farmer dances (which rotated between host clubs, and were widely attend by multi-regional members and non-members alike), as well as yearly hockey and broomball tournaments, were decidedly less formal. These events largely allowed youth to meet, celebrate, and forge inter-county social connections at their own leisure. Other highlighted initiatives, such as the 'Farmers' Olympics', 'Winter Games' (a provincial sports and dancing competition), and 'March Conference' (a forum for leadership and community-networking, featuring guest speakers and instructional sessions) provided structured environments with emphasis on round-table discussion, friendly competition and debate, and more formalized learning.

While structured events appeared to include some measure of time for playing games and cavorting with friends, they also provided a platform for Junior Farmers to encounter outside individuals, and to connect with issues affecting modern rural life. According to several respondents, politicians and MPP's, local industry representatives, and members of various

agricultural associations were frequent attendees. These individuals generally acted to promote local and provincial interests by engaging with youth about current issues, providing club funding, and granting donations and awards. These gatherings also provided, at times, an opportunity to meet and engage with individuals from outside of Canada - two respondents indicated that they had had the opportunity to interact with youth delegates from similarly-aligned clubs in Europe.

‘March Conference’ was identified specifically in two instances, as having inspired young volunteers to community action:

“I met [a young entrepreneur within the dairy industry], and she was talking about, you know... how do we promote agriculture? ... I was like, well yeah, people don’t know anything about agriculture, but what you want me to do about it? Cause I was a high school student, right? Well, she said just... just make a presentation, and show it in your class. And I thought that was a good idea. So last year in May... I think it was my first one, and it was to a hundred students... I overran my [school] period because the presentation became so long, with questions... And I thought, well – this is kind of fun. So I did it again, and again...”

This individual went on to present approximately seven times within his school, speaking to over three hundred students about everyday farming practices – about feeding animals, weaning calves, crop rotation, and other topics. In interview, he credited his inspiration entirely to the visiting speaker he had met at the conference. In another case, the respondent was in the process of organizing an ‘on-farm’ breakfast, designed to bring community members (including urban and ‘non-farm’ individuals) to visit a commercial dairy operation. The aim was to provide local people with tours of the facilities, to answer their questions about milk production, and to encourage the consumption of local goods and produce. Here again, inspiration had been found during the March Conference, when the success of a similar venture had been presented to the

group. In the words of one young woman, “[y]ou create a lot of connections, although you might not realize how useful they are until later”.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, it is appropriate to revisit the work of Flora and Flora (2008), Putnam (2000), Agnitsch, Flora, & Ryan (2006), and others, who have given extensive consideration to the connectivity-based and interactional manifestations of social capital within community networks. It may be recalled that the presence of two forms of social capital, both ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’, are considered essential to the overall social well-being of a particular community; and further that each form is manifested, and subsequently enacts its interpersonal effects, in differing ways (Agnitsch, Flora, & Ryan, 2006; Flora & Flora, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Robison & Flora, 2003; Zacharakis & Flora, 2005). ‘Bonding’ social capital again refers to, “connections among individuals and groups with similar backgrounds. These connections may be based principally on class, ethnicity, kinship, gender, or similar social characteristics... [B]onding ties are affective or emotionally charged” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 125). ‘Bridging’ social capital, conversely, refers to those relations that connect, “diverse groups within the community to each other and to groups outside the community... Bridging social capital fosters diversity of ideas and brings together diverse people” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 125). Thus, it is of particular significance to highlight the ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ qualities of youths’ relationships within each of the above-established ‘spheres of interaction’ – specifically, youth-leader relationships (in the case of 4-H) and youth-executive relationships (in the case of JF), local club meetings and activities, and provincial and national events.

Firstly, it is argued that leader-youth and executive-youth relationships may be considered predominantly ‘bonding’ in nature. Most obviously, youth members were likely to share not only a proximal place of residence with leaders and executives, but also a similar familial socio-economic status and ethno-cultural background. Undoubtedly, geographic proximity was most evident in the case of 4-H clubs, where leaders and members resided in close clusters of towns and their surrounding rural areas. While Junior Farmer members and executives tended to be more geographically dispersed, they nonetheless shared life-experiences within rural centers that were known, accessible to, and acknowledged by, each other. More importantly to the development of ‘bonding’ relationships, all participants alluded to the existence of club environments in which the relational effects of age-disparity were somewhat minimized. While leaders and executives certainly possessed a unique and respected status within club circles, a ‘commonality of experience’ (facilitated by mutual topics of interest, shared completion goals, and the opportunity for collective enjoyment) clearly emerged. Indeed, leaders and executives acted as primary points of contact for youth looking to enroll in specific clubs, as well as sustained figures of guidance throughout the club completion process; however, they were also acknowledged as veritable ‘gatekeepers’ in the transmission of social, leadership, and even entrepreneurial skills to youth. As has been discussed, this transmission of knowledge from relative-adult to young person resulted in the creation of many local, inter-generational relationships which were “highly affective” and “emotionally charged” in the manner previously described (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 125).

When evaluating the second sphere of club interaction (4-H and Junior Farmer meetings and local activities) as a locus for the establishment of community ties, certain difficulties instinctively emerge. The peer-based friendships which were so highly valued by 4-H and Junior

Farmer members, and which were facilitated and strengthened by local club programs, are quite simple to classify. Comprised of both affective and instructive connections between youth of similar ages and backgrounds, these relationships were undoubtedly ‘bonding’ in nature and form. Difficulties arose, however, when evaluating the linkages created by ‘visitors’ to the club environment. In practice, Putnam (2000) reminds researchers that most social networks tend not to be exclusively ‘bonding’ or ‘bridging’ in orientation. He argues, rather, that these networks will tend to encompass both forms of social capital to differing degrees (Putnam, 2000). This assertion is perhaps most evident in the case of 4-H clubs. In specific, visitors to 4-H club meetings became important sources for the gathering of outside knowledge by youth. Guests’ presence within the familiar and structured atmosphere of meetings provided youth with the opportunity to encounter novel personalities, situations, and ideas, in an environment that was comfortable for them. In most cases, guest speakers and field-trip hosts resided in the same general demographic area as leaders and club members, theoretically representing an opportunity for ‘bonding’ and the solidification of local community connections; and yet, many visitors were previously unknown to members, were of a significantly different age demographic, or were located in residences and/or businesses which were inaccessible to young people without appropriate transportation. These considerations suggest that such encounters must be recognized for their ‘bridging’ capacities as well, and for the manner in which they connected, “diverse groups within the community to each other” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 125).

Similar consideration is required in instances where linkages were formed through local club participation in larger volunteer initiatives. In undertaking tasks related to event-planning, local fairs, and co-hosted fundraisers, 4-Hers and Junior Farmers had the opportunity to network with a multitude of individuals of diverse ages and backgrounds. Smaller events (such as

community barbeques and car-washes) drew fellow volunteers, community representatives, and patrons from one central geographic area, allowing youth to engage with proximal individuals through mutual work and conversation. Here again, these instances served to facilitate ‘bridging’ connections between youth and local cohorts with which they were unfamiliar; and yet, if such volunteer engagements were repeated over time, or if youth were to encounter these individuals in external situations (formal or casual), the potential existed for further ‘bonding’ connectivity. In other cases of large-scale event participation, the reach of youths’ social interactions could be quite geographically extensive. Events such as ‘home-fairs’, car rallies, or tractor pulls had the potential to place youth within reach of individuals visiting and/or touring their home area from a significant distance. Such passing interactions, though they may lead to future recognition or exchange, were not likely to preclude the intensive emotions that characterize ‘bonding’ ties. Nevertheless, these encounters provided youth with valuable opportunities to make ‘bridging’ connections with the public, learning about others’ ways of life while sharing insight into their own.

The third sphere of club member interaction – that which is facilitated by provincial and national events – has been shown to provide youth with unique opportunities for the establishment of both ‘bonding’ ties and ‘bridging’ connections. While youth may attend conferences, regional livestock shows, and intellectual and sporting competitions alongside friends from their local clubs, they do so with the express desire to encounter delegates from outside communities and organizations. Valuable opportunities were provided for periodic engagement with local leaders of industry and politics, as well as experts in the field of agriculture and rural community planning. These interactions did much to ‘bridge’ attendees’ understandings of rural issues across Canada, to facilitate group problem-solving, and to

encourage both expert and peer-based mentoring. More importantly to respondents, large-scale 4-H and Junior Farmers' events promoted solidarity amongst members of their rural age demographic, by encouraging bonds of friendship between like-minded clubbers from across the province. Unique to these provincial events was the possibility of repeated access to and reunion with new friends (especially those separated by significant geographic distance) so long as members maintained regular event attendance.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In the closing chapter of this study, analysis necessarily returns to the central hypothesis of the preceding research - that the social capital built and circulated within 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs should have a positive effect on the local socio-emotional 'mooring' of rural young people. Once again, it has been conjectured that the greater the stock of social capital that is available within these organizations, the greater the internal 'pull' that they and their surrounding communities should exert upon youth. As has been summarily established in the previous chapter, the interactional opportunities available to youth within the forums of 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs are extremely diverse. The existence of both 'bonding' and 'bridging' linkages – each of which are considered necessary to the socio-cultural viability of rural communities - are highly observable within and throughout the experiential narratives of both youth and their leaders. As the breadth and personal influence of such interactions was discussed extensively by participants, it is thus appropriate and highly pertinent to proceed with the intended investigation (Emery & Flora, 2006; Flora & Flora, 1993).

Due to the intangible nature of 'social capital' as a resource and theoretical construct, this study has made no claim towards its direct measure (Robison & Flora, 2003). Nonetheless, as social capital is evidenced by increased levels of social trust, reciprocity between community members, and the securing of networks of support, several criteria have been established by which the above hypothesis will now be tested. Social capital, as it presents within the interactional spheres of 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs, will indeed be appraised for its influence upon the local 'mooring' of rural young people. As has previously been established, this

evaluation (and thus the remaining passages of this chapter) will be organized according to the following directives:

- Firstly, participation in voluntary organizations should allow youth to feel that they are *active contributors to their communities of origin*.
- Secondly, voluntary participation amongst rural youth should foster *communication and understanding across generations*.
- Thirdly, in locales where social capital (as facilitated by youth volunteer organizations) is high, community members should share *high levels of social trust*.
- Fourthly, youth participating in volunteer organizations should have an overall *sense of social support and belonging* within their communities of origin.
- Finally, and perhaps most significantly, rural youth who are active in volunteer organizations should indicate a relatively *low preference for future out-migration* from the home community.

Active Contribution to the ‘Community of Origin’: Conceptual Challenges

As club members’ extensive contributions to civic and social activities have been self-recognized and well-established by participants within the preceding chapter, this section will aim instead to engage with the complexity of youths’ perceptions of their so-called ‘communities of origin’. In order to adequately illustrate youth volunteers’ overall sense of local impact and connectivity, consideration must first be given to the multiplicity of definitions by which they have come to understand the aforementioned term. The implications of the following findings will carry throughout the remainder of this discussion, and will have far-reaching consequences for further analysis of the lived experiences of rural youth volunteers.

Within the context of youth interviews, efforts to define the ‘home community’ or ‘community of origin’ were met with several terminological and conceptual challenges. This research generally accepts the notion of ‘community’ as a social construction, comprised of, “local social systems which are spatially organized, and within which there are both shared interests and conflicts based on class differences, as well as other factors such as gender, age, race, and ethnicity” (Winson and Leach, 2002, p. 33). Nevertheless, it had been anticipated that, due to the limited socio-physical mobility of younger cohorts, youth would distinguish specific geographic demarcations by which they could identify their perceived ‘home’ territory. In actuality, when presented with requests involving qualification of the ‘home’ region (for example, *‘Please tell me about the community in which you currently live. Where is it located and what makes it unique?’*, or *‘How strongly do you feel a sense of membership to your local community?’*), most respondents displayed some degree of confusion or hesitation, or required further clarification of meaning. When, in these instances, youth were directed to consider their responses within a geo-spatial context, the vast majority selected not one, but *multiple*, geographic spheres as personally relevant. These diverse ‘communities of origin’ typically included nearby towns and villages (whether or not youth actually resided within them), rural townships, and even counties. Characterized by one young woman, “I love Ontario, I love Wellington [County], I love Erin Township, and then I love my Hillsburgh”.

Within the broad spectrum of these responses, another critical theme was found to reside; namely that for many club members, “4-H [or indeed Junior Farmers] is basically our community, it’s everything we do up here”. In fact, it was found that when referencing “*my* community” or “*the* community” over the course of conversation, youth were far more likely to be speaking of the circle of influence of their clubs, than any physical location relative to place

of residence. In explicating these unanticipated observations, it is useful to once again consult the works of Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora, who have written extensively on manifestations of social capital within rural North American communities (Flora, 1998; Flora & Flora, 2008). These authors offer a useful framework for the conceptualization of the above findings, through the illustration of social networks within so-called ‘*communities of place*’ and ‘*communities of interest*’ (Flora, 1998; Flora & Flora, 2008). Unsurprisingly, ‘*communities of place*’ are said to, “involv[e] relationships with the people, cultures, and environments, both natural and built, associated with a particular [geographic] area” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p. 13). Due to the frequent scattering of needed amenities and cultural resources across rural localities, Flora & Flora (2008) confirm that, “[f]or many rural residents, the area associated with a particular place may be very different from any area defined by the political boundaries of a town or even county” (p. 13). Undoubtedly, these assertions are highly reminiscent of the multiplicity of geographic ‘home spheres’ referenced by young people within interview dialogue. Additionally, Flora & Flora (2008) argue that modern technological advancements (such as telecommunications and transportation systems) in less populated areas have increasingly aided in the development of rural ‘*communities of interest*’, whereby, “people feel a sense of community with those who do similar things or share in common certain values, not with those living in the same town... These people share a common identity – they interact through meetings... e-mail, or telephone – yet they are [physically] dispersed” (p. 13-14). Here again, reflections of the responses of 4-H and Junior Farmer members, in relation to ‘club communities’, are observed.

Perhaps naively, this research study was designed with a belief that physical locality would dominate youths’ conceptions of ‘community’, and that participation in 4-H and Junior

Farmers' clubs would act overwhelmingly to connect youth with individuals and groups within their own physical proximity; however, the ambiguity of geographical community-markers within the minds of involved youth, as well as their convictions as to the expansive socio-physical connectivity of club-life, has assuredly called these assumptions into question. In an effort to remain true to the beliefs and perceptions of the young people who have participated in this study, and in order to maintain a commitment to reflexivity over the course of the research process, a shift in conceptual focus is here introduced. In place of discussion centered primarily upon the mooring effects of social capital within the geographical 'home community' (otherwise known as the '*community of place*'), this analysis will emphasize the mooring effect of youths' relationships within recognized '*communities of interest*' (ie. the geographically diverse social networks and locations which are encompassed by, or which extend from, organizational activities). Supported by the personal narratives of study participants, this framework will prove more appropriately suited to the apprehension of youth volunteers' impressions of 'rural communities', and to an understanding of their perceived social positioning within them.

Communication, Understanding, & Trust Across Generations

Not surprisingly, two of the established identifiers of social capital in rural communities - '*communication and understanding across generations*', and manifestations of '*social trust*' - were found to be highly associated within youths' commentaries on rural and club community networks. As a result, these markers of localized social cohesion will be explored and exemplified jointly in the following section. Within the preceding chapter, 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs have already been shown to provide extensive inter-generational and communicative opportunities to youth, through the facilitation of dialogue and the encouragement of youth exchange with individuals of diverse social backgrounds. The

following section will extend this discussion further, by demonstrating the *socio-emotional impact* of these community interactions upon youth. Discourse will center upon youths' perceived ability to advance appropriate reputations for themselves and their peers, and upon participants' impressions of the youth-centered attitudes and projections of elders within involved community networks.

On the whole, participants shared a fairly optimistic outlook regarding youths' ability, as a cohort, to establish trust and mutual understanding with elders in rural communities. While the majority of young respondents (nine out of thirteen) observed that elder generations possessed 'mixed feelings' in regards to local young people, they also (as will be discussed) possessed keen insight as to why such conflicting opinions might exist. Encouragingly, only one respondent felt that elders' impressions of youth were consistently negative, while the remaining three young people indicated feeling 'undecided' about such matters. These findings provide an encouraging contrast to the results of previous studies, by researchers such as Malatest & Associates (2002), Meek (2008) and Haugen & Villa (2006), who reported overwhelming feelings of local mistrust, irritation, and disapproval as perceived by (and perhaps genuinely projected upon) youth in rural localities. Interestingly, conceptions of what might be considered 'interactionally-relevant' or 'applicable' populations of said elders were extremely broad in nature. When solicited with questions such as, "*How do you perceive that elders view youth within your community?*", or "*What roles (if any) do elders attribute to local youth?*", young respondents reaffirmed quite broad definitions of rural community and locality. Volunteers' accounts of the views of elders were consistently expressed *in genere*, and did not - in any instance - refer to the opinions of residents of any particular town, village, or other geographic region. It is again surmised that

this may be a result of the density and diversity of intergenerational contacts and opportunities within 4-H and Junior Farmers' club networks.

Perhaps most importantly, youth volunteers expressed a distinct assurance that they could affect elders' impressions of their character within rural communities – that they, as individuals, possessed the agency, ability, and opportunity, to establish themselves as trustworthy and capable citizens. In qualifying their beliefs as to the 'mixed' impressions of elders, interviewees expressed the following sentiments: “[The older generation’s opinion] depends on what we do. I think the ‘4-H group’ or ‘volunteering group’ is like, the *good* group. We’re solid and we’re helping our future... And then I find the kids that don’t, it’s like they’re [seen as] trouble-makers and they’re annoying”; another young person relates, “[e]veryone loves the Junior Farmers – we’re always there to help... Then there’s the other group of people that totally just do what they want”; and finally, “[i]f you’re out doing something good, the older generations will appreciate that. I don’t think all older people would say, ‘I think all kids are bad’ or whatever... But they can see the difference!”. Unquestionably, the majority of young volunteers believed that the respect of rural elders should be duly earned. Even more encouraging was youths’ acknowledgment that the concerted efforts they had made, as a result of their club involvement, had indeed rewarded them with the trust of fellow residents as well as a distinct level of collective respect.

On the whole, 4-Hers and Junior Farmers were overwhelmingly respectful of older cohorts, with ten out of thirteen respondents citing elder rural residents as ‘hard-working’, as ‘sources of knowledge’, or as individuals to ‘look up to’, or ‘aspire to be’. One young person indicated, “it’s a lot of hard work to keep your farm going these days... so there’s a lot of respect”; a second identified older generations as the source of the “do unto others mentality”

that so permeated volunteers' impressions of rural life. Nonetheless, youth respondents held their elders to standards of behaviour and intention which closely mirrored those that they themselves faced. Several acknowledged the presence of older individuals who (despite their place of residence) were not truly 'rural' people, as they did not live a lifestyle which supported local involvement. According to one young woman, "[our level of respect] depends on the person... If they're involved in the community themselves, it makes a difference". Another shares, "[i]f we know who they are, and you know, they're respectful [to us], we would see them as founts of knowledge. But people who won't pull over when the tractor's coming... well, not so much".

Sense of Social Support

Undoubtedly, the most obvious displays of inter-generational support within club communities are the noted 'mentoring' relationships which have been shown to develop between youth and leaders/executives. As foreshadowed in the 'Results' chapter of this study, nearly all of the involved youth subjects (eleven of thirteen) could identify local leaders whom they considered to be mentors – adults who had invested time or enacted a special interest in their personal and social development. In fact, several youth experienced difficulty in selecting any single individual to discuss in interview, favouring accounts of multiple associates who personified the above qualities. As has been extensively discussed, volunteers could also readily identify displays of community support via the attendance of local individuals to special club events - these included achievement presentations, award ceremonies, livestock shows, and rehearsals and presentations of plays and other artistic programs. One young woman noted the resounding power of such public recognition, "[w]hen you win an award, your parents and your

club, and other community people will recognize that. Sometimes they put up these plaques [in community spaces], and you can see the club's history by looking at them!"

Perhaps in response to these contributions of outside interest, 4-Hers and Junior Farmers were shown to have developed very particular impressions of their social 'role' within rural communities. When discussing these hypothetical responsibilities, volunteers placed significant emphasis on reciprocity of civic energies, as well as on the value of continued guidance and learning from adult community members. Six out of thirteen youth indicated a perceived duty towards maintaining a "rural backbone" or strong work-ethic, and providing "new energy" towards the completion of local initiatives and the sustenance of agricultural economies. According to one young man, "[w]e are the next generation, so I guess we have to learn from what the older people are doing, and step up. Our community lies within our hands, I guess, right?"; a second respondent relates that, "[a]s a young person, our job would be... to be learning but not think that you know everything. It's cheaper to learn from somebody who's already made the mistake than to make it yourself"; additionally, "[it's] learning the skills that the elder generation has, so they can keep things going... No one likes to see a farm get sold for development, and it's good to see young people involved in the industry".

Beyond this capacity for learning, three respondents also noted the need for innovation and community outreach amongst youth in changing rural (and specifically agricultural) landscapes – "[our responsibility is also to be] introducing new skills, and to get new ideas going. Because sometimes it's hard to do that with the older generation". Characteristically, "I think we're there to keep agriculture alive. It's dying... We're a dying breed, definitely... [It's our job] to educate the public, as much as we might hate doing that"; and further, "[w]e have to

spread the word about rural life... It's not weird that I have to go and shovel manure tonight... It's not weird, and it's not 'olden-day'. And a lot of people have no exposure".

The perceived inheritance of such constructive roles within rural and volunteer communities appeared to impart upon youth a significant sense of self-efficacy and purpose. Indeed, the endowment of such ideals of responsibility, along with the practical and social skills gained through club participation, gave subjects an express level of confidence when speaking about their ability to enact positive change. This sense of agency was indeed applied towards the betterment of rural communities as a whole; however, it was also applied to the improvement of youths' own lives and their prospects for the future. Six of the involved youth noted a 'maturing' effect in relation to club participation, with comments such as, "[i]t makes you a more *grounded* person", "[y]ou absorb positivity towards helping – it makes you less selfish", and, "it opens your eyes to 'real life' beyond your horizons". Eight youth respondents noted personal increases in self-esteem in relation to public speaking, meeting new individuals, and general skills related to socializing. Finally, and most concretely, eight youth also recognized social benefits related to educational and employment prospects – "[t]he clubs look *awesome* on a resume, and with those kinda skills, you have lots to talk about in an interview"; "I definitely have gotten a job just from being in 4-H, working with the [local] Conservation Authority... [I was told] 'That's why I took out your resume!'"; and, "I got financial scholarships for school through 4-H!". Indeed, seven of these youth admitted that volunteer and club involvement had helped to shape their plans for the future – "[v]olunteering gives you the experience to say, I definitely want to do *this* or *that*... Or, I want to surround myself with people like *this*, or not...". One young woman identified the experience of '*Learning to Do By Doing*', along with the steady example of her 4-H leader, as inspiring her desire to someday become a schoolteacher.

Another spoke of his desire for future employment within the agricultural service sector, feeling that his club involvement had already helped him to forge important industry connections - “[sometimes] it’s not *what* you know, but *who* you know in agriculture”.

Sense of Belonging & Preferences for Future Out-Migration

In order to obtain a somewhat quantifiable reading on volunteers’ overall ‘sense of belonging’ within rural communities, the closing phases of interview scheduling included the following question: “*On a scale of 1-10, how strongly do you feel a sense of ‘membership’ to your local community? Please explain*”. Responses to this request proved to be intriguingly polarizing – in specific, three youth responded with answers of ‘9’ or ‘10’, five provided approximations of ‘8’, two provided responses of ‘5’, one gave an answer of ‘4’, and two indicated that they were ‘unsure’. Unfortunately (and in hindsight not surprisingly), this query proved to be fraught with intricacies, not least of which were those of definition. Based on the positivity of volunteers’ earlier responses regarding opportunities for youth involvement, the existence of intergenerational trust and understanding, and the presence of local support for youth in rural communities, it had been assumed that the vast majority of individuals should rank fairly highly on the ‘belongingness’ scale; however, here again the complexities of *communities of interest* versus *communities of place*, and their relationship to the social ‘mooring’ of rural young people, emerged.

Upon further inspection, it was discovered that in each instance of a ranking of ‘5 or lower’ (including those who responded with ‘unsure’), the question had been interpreted as referring to a specific *community of place* – generally a proximal rural town or village. One young woman shared that a recent residential move was the cause for this geographic disconnect,

while three others gave somewhat more stratified responses. In these cases, youth indicated that their sense of belonging was “different for different circles” - “I don’t really have ties in town, I’m pretty disconnected from [*name of town*] itself... My connection is to the volunteering [*community*]”. Conversely, of the eight individuals who ranked a score of ‘8 or above’, three spoke exclusively of their perceived volunteer communities (ie. their *communities of interest*), again downplaying the effects of residential location. One female respondent, who reported a belongingness ranking of ‘10’, shared, “that’s for, like, [*my club region*]... Not for, uh, the businesses or the downtown area... My clubs have made a difference for me”. Amongst the five remaining participants, rankings appeared to be the result of a combination of linkages, within both *communities of interest* as well as *communities of place*. Sentiments of having been, “born and raised there”, of “knowing every back road”, and “recognizing every neighbour that drives by”, were equally weighted with considerations of, “seeing clubbers in the [*local*] newspaper”, and “being so involved with volunteering - you care about people, and they care about you”.

While the conclusions that can be drawn from the above results are extremely limited, two underlying themes can indeed be observed. Firstly, these responses have reinforced the importance of allowing youth to define their own social and physical realities. Clearly, the utilization of a single definition of ‘community’ would not have been appropriate for all participants, and would have excluded valuable insight over the course of the research process. Secondly, it can be said that the involvement of youth in the 4-H and Junior Farmers’ organizations does not necessarily guarantee a sense of belongingness within a particular geographic locality. While clubs certainly have the potential to aid in the creation of physically-localized linkages (depending on the geographic sphere of their activities), wider rural

connections (forged through the expansiveness of club and volunteering networks) appear to be just as, or even more, relevant to youths' comprehensive sense of emplacement.

Such diverse impressions of 'belongingness' (encompassing both specific physical localities, as well as wider interest-based networks) were also reflected in volunteers' intentions towards migration and future residence. Gabriel (2006) has argued that rural young people are quite adept at adjusting their identities to differing social situations; and furthermore, that success or failure within any particular social milieu may contribute to, but not represent the whole of, a rural young person's overall sense of acceptance and emplacement (Gabriel, 2006). These impressions were somewhat evident amidst the responses of volunteers. With the exception of three young people (two of whom possessed locational attachments so firm that they desired never to leave their home-places, and one of whom expressed a notably strong desire to escape his area of residence), most shared a significant degree of flexibility in their plans for future mobility. Specifically, three youth indicated a wish to 'stay close to home' or 'within a couple of concessions of home' if opportunity would allow, while six of the remaining seven individuals indicated a general desire to continue to reside in a rural area (even if that area was not proximal to the community from whence they came). While the residential and locational form of the future remained rather unclear for most, not a *single* respondent indicated a desire for urban living, or for a drastic change in residential surroundings.

As noted, socio-economic considerations (such as educational and occupational prospects, and the availability and affordability of property) factored highly into youths' prospective plans - comments regarding the expense of rural land, and concern for the cost-effectiveness of farming endeavours, were common. Nonetheless, youths' expressions of attachment to their perceived *communities of interest* were also highly evident. Respondents

spoke of the geniality of rural volunteers, of eagerness to raise a family in an atmosphere of trust and familiarity, and of the safety and calm of rural living. Several also referenced a desire to ‘give back’ to local networks, by continuing to pursue volunteer opportunities, and by assuming leadership roles through 4-H and Junior Farmers’ in adulthood. To this effect, one young person shared this heartening remark: “Wherever you land, that community could become yours – start a 4-H club, and away you go...”

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, the most challenging conceptual hurdle in the navigation of this study was the utilization of ‘social capital’ as a marker for rural community health. While acknowledged as a useful social resource in practice, and a beneficial exemplar of collectivity and reciprocity in theory, it could not - by its very nature – be applied to direct observation. Instead, the attempt has been made to investigate the proposed ‘indicators’ of social capital within rural and volunteer communities, and to determine whether the presence of these indicators has accordingly led to perceived emplacement and rural ‘mooring’ amongst 4-H and Junior Farmer members. It is here argued that extensive opportunities for youth involvement (within diverse and interactionally-dense club networks), have *undoubtedly* effected a highly positive social outlook upon involved youth. Repeated demonstrations of trust, respect, and inter-generational confidence, have undeniably been associated with an overall sense of rural belongingness and emplacement, on behalf of the overwhelming majority of youth subjects. Nonetheless, this phenomenon did not present itself in the manner which had been conceptualized and anticipated by the initial hypotheses. While youth overwhelmingly expressed sentiments of ‘belonging’ or ‘mooring’ within their respective rural communities, these ‘communities’ quickly emerged as very heterogeneous in form. Young people were quite comfortable in promoting attachments to ‘the rural community’ in general, or to a volunteer network within a broad area, *with* or *without* feeling that they needed to be attached to the ‘nearest town’, or to belong with and/or relate to everyone within a certain physical locality.

Although this *community of interest* versus *community of place* distinction had a significant effect on the directionality of youths' feelings of belonging, noted instances of non-identification with proximal geographic localities did not appear to impose any significant social stress. What mattered, according to the personal accounts of participants, was how an individual defined 'rurality' and 'rural community' for themselves, as well as the degree to which their overall sense of 'identity' and 'belongingness' conformed to their unique definitions. As a result of club involvement, youth volunteers indeed displayed an understanding that they possessed a devoted role within the diversity of rural Ontarian communities, and that their smaller social collectives were a part of a much wider world. 'Rural opportunity' and 'rural connectedness' were thus seen on a far grander scale than the early constructs of this study had allowed; and most importantly, such far-reaching impressions of emplacement appear to have buffered 4-H and Junior Farmers' members against the apprehensions of rural loneliness, isolation, and social derision which have featured so prominently in previous rural-youth research.

In relation to issues of rural population retention, this social connection of volunteers to broader rural networks proves to be somewhat important. Most of the interviewed youth understood or believed that for educational or employment-related reasons, they would likely have to undertake permanent moves of residential location in future. While a few individuals indicated that they would ideally like to return to the very same community in which they had spent their formative years, others desired the opportunity to pursue 'rural living' in general, within other non-urban Ontarian localities. In this way, the support of 4-H and Junior Farmers' activities within *individual* rural communities may represent a hypothetical investment in rural sustainability on a *provincial* level. Rural areas and small towns may not necessarily retain or regain the very same individuals who once participated within their devoted landscapes and

networks; however, they may be able to reserve a degree of hope towards gaining new individuals who have shared similar volunteering backgrounds and experiences. Obviously, the degree to which such migration patterns may occur, in reality, is well beyond the scope of the current research. Nevertheless, it is hoped that rural communities that have invested in youth volunteer initiatives, most specifically 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs, may take pride in the understanding that they are fostering future rural 'allies' – young adults who will remember and value their rural roots, who will carry an understanding of the joys and trials of rural living into their future endeavours, and who may one day represent rural concerns in business, politics, and community-planning.

4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs allow rural dwellers to make significant social overtures to young people, to demonstrate their interest in and concern for youth in rural communities, and to bring feelings of hope, excitement, and purpose to areas of rural Ontario which might otherwise have had much less to offer. The results of this study should provide encouragement to the many club leaders, executives, administrators, and sponsors, who continue to donate valuable time and energy to the engagement of rural youth within these forums. In addition, local government bodies should feel encouraged to seek out 4-H and Junior Farmers' clubs within rural areas, to solicit members' involvement in local initiatives and community revitalization projects, and to put to best use the positive energies and invigorating spirit that young volunteers have so clearly displayed.

Limitations

Incidentally, the most basic limitations of this study can be related to issues of sampling, and restrictions of access to intended research populations. As has been discussed at length within the 'Methods' chapter of this discussion, contact with subjects was highly dependent upon

so-called ‘snowball’ sampling methods (the location of subjects via progressively chained contact networks). This reality, combined with a relatively limited sample size of eighteen individuals (considered appropriate for the purposes of a Masters-thesis project), naturally impeded any statistical significance of data. In addition, the possibility for generalization of findings, to rural youth populations outside of the established physical area and volunteer-based sample, may understandably be quite limited. Indeed, this project - by express intention - examined only one very distinct subsection of young residents within the rural towns and townships involved.

While 4-H and Junior Farmers clubs have progressively adjusted their programming and promotional initiatives, and have evidently increased the diversity of project themes in order to attract a wider base of young rural dwellers, the success of these recent attempts should perhaps be viewed with certain caution. Based on the prevalence of interview dialogue regarding livestock, crops, farm machinery, and other agriculturally-based subjects, it can yet be surmised that clubs primarily draw from young Ontarians with previously-established interest in traditionally ‘rural’ activities. This idea of ‘farm-centrism’ is certainly a matter of contention, and a view that modern clubs, in large part, are attempting to counter. Nonetheless, it remains possible (and perhaps even likely), that the participants encountered within this study may not represent the socio-demographic *diversity* of young Ontarians in the 21st century. Understandably, 4-H and Junior Farmers members may not be properly equipped to speak for rural Ontarian youth as a generalized cohort, or specifically for those whose recreational interests lie outside the scope of club spheres.

In addition to these considerations, potential bias must also be recognized in the very *personalities* of the young people who agreed to participate in the current research. Specifically,

youth who were more conversationally-confident, who possessed a greater stock of club experience about which to speak, or who felt more overwhelmingly positive about their overall volunteering endeavours, may have been more willing to proffer themselves for interview than their shyer, less confident, or less-experienced peers. While this is a common complication for social researchers, and an unavoidable consequence of the selected method of volunteer recruitment, it is a particularly important observation in this circumstance (given the relative age and social inexperience of the majority of subjects).

Avenues for Future Research

As this study was primarily exploratory in nature, and as it has relied exclusively upon the subjective reflections of participants, clear avenues have been established for the conduction of further research involving youth volunteers within rural communities. Firstly, it is suggested that future inquiry into the creation of social capital within the forums of 4-H, Junior Farmers, and other rural service clubs, may benefit from the incorporation of participant-observation methods. Due to the structural constraints of a masters' thesis project, such sustained participation was not achievable within this context; however, it is believed that direct apprehension of the actions of youth, leaders/executives, and outside community members (during club meetings and other events), would provide invaluable insight as to the creation and maintenance of intergenerational relationships in rural localities. Indeed, participant observation could aid in identification of the methods by which social capital is built within the rural community – the methods by which volunteers interact to create social reality through the building of relationships amongst members.

Secondly, opportunity has been presented for the conduction of long-term research into the life-trajectories of rural youth volunteers. While youth have been enabled to share their thoughts and intentions for the future, and have been asked to consider the continuing impact that club-membership may have, the reality and feasibility of these future proposals is obviously unknowable at this time. Longitudinally-focused research should attempt to discern, through instances of observation throughout adolescence and early adulthood, how club-membership (and early feelings of rural trust, support and belongingness), realistically impact the eventual experiences of former members. Topics for further research could include: distribution of employment (by sector), place of residence (rural vs. non-rural, proximity to 'community of origin'), and degree of continuing rural advocacy and/or rural volunteer involvement.

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APPENDIX A: TELEPHONE RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR CLUB LEADERS

Good afternoon/evening,

My name is Kristina Eisenbach, and I am a Masters Student with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph. I'm currently conducting a study which explores the lives of rural youth volunteers in your area. I was referred to you by [insert name]/I came across your name in [insert publication/website], and I'm wondering if I might be able to talk to you briefly about the research I'm conducting?

...

The purpose of my study is to gain insight into the lives of young people within rural Ontario, and to learn about the impact that volunteering may have on their connections to the community. I'm aiming to identify some of the social challenges that young people face in rural areas, and to understand how volunteering affects the ways in which they deal with these challenges. In conducting my research, I'm looking to work with several youth volunteer clubs, from such groups as 4H Ontario, the Junior Farmers Association, etc., and I'm calling to enquire as to whether you and your club or volunteer group might be interested in participating. May I tell you a bit more about my work?

...

My research has three aims: First, I'd like to understand further how young people think about their "rural" identity. Secondly, I'd like to understand the ways in which youth volunteer organizations promote a sense of local community through communication, collaboration, and the sharing of goals. And finally, I'd like to explore the impact of volunteering on rural youths' personal sense of belonging to the local area, and on their plans for the future.

I'm hoping to have approximately five clubs in total involved in this project, each located within about a two-hour radius of the University. The research itself would involve my visiting one or two of your scheduled meetings to observe your interactions and learn about the proceedings of your club. Following that, I would be asking approximately four young people, and one of your club leaders, to volunteer for a one-hour one-on-one interview with me.

Any information shared with me would be kept completely confidential. I would not be telling anyone what you have said, nor would you be identified in my final results. Participation is completely voluntary, and if you and your members were to decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. If at any time you or they would like personal information removed from the study, I would also do that directly.

I'm wondering at this point if you might have any initial questions for me? If you think that you and your club might like to be involved, I would be happy to visit one of your meetings to explain the details further – or if you would like to take some time to reflect on this opportunity, I can be reached at either keisenba@uoguelph.ca, or 519-829-8157 at a later date.

[Potentially set up an initial meeting here.]

...

Thank you so very much for your time. I truly appreciate your conversation and interest, and I'm looking forward to seeing you/hoping to hear from you soon.

Take care,

Kristina

APPENDIX B



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES

YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

WHO WILL BE DOING THIS RESEARCH?

My name is Kristina Eisenbach. I am a masters student with the Sociology & Anthropology Department at the University of Guelph. I am conducting this study as a requirement in completing my M.A. degree. If at any time you have questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact me at 519-829-8157. My advisor, Dr. Belinda Leach, Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology, may also be reached at bleach@uoguelph.ca.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ALL ABOUT?

I am pleased to invite you to participate in a research study which explores the life experiences of youth volunteers in your area. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into young people's lives within rural Ontario, and to learn about the impact that volunteering has had on your connection with the community. I aim to identify some of the social challenges that you face as a young person in a rural area, and to understand how your volunteer activities have affected the way you see and deal with those challenges.

WHAT WILL THIS RESEARCH DO?

This research will draw attention to the social needs and concerns of youth within your area of rural Ontario. It is hoped that findings will aid policy-makers and community leaders in making decisions that best support local youth activities.

HOW WILL I BE INVOLVED?

In agreeing to participate in this research, I will be asking you to complete an individual interview which will last for approximately one hour. Only you and I will be present during these interviews. I'll be audio-recording our session; however, no one will have access to these records but myself and Dr. Leach.

My audio device, as well as any notes and recordings I may take will be stored in a locked and secure location. The computer I use will also be electronically encrypted to ensure your privacy. After five years, all of the data I have gathered will be permanently destroyed.

WHO WILL KNOW WHAT I SAY?

The information that you share with me is completely confidential.* I will not tell anyone what you have said, and you will not be identified in my final results.

**The only thing I would be legally required to report is a) if you told me you were planning on hurting yourself, b) if you told me you were planning on hurting someone else, or c) if you were being abused. If this was the case, I would encourage you to report this yourself and would support you in doing so.*

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

Absolutely not. It is your choice whether or not to participate in this study. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. If you would like your information removed from the study, I will do so right away. You can also refuse to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. You are not waiving any legal claims or rights by participating.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

| | | |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| Research Ethics Officer | Telephone: | (519) 824-4120 ext. 56606 |
| University of Guelph | E-mail: | sauld@uoguelph.ca |
| 437 University Centre | Fax: | (519) 821-5236 |
| Guelph, ON N1G 2W1 | | |

Signature of Research Participant

I have read the information provided for the research as described in this letter. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Kristina Eisenbach

Signature

APPENDIX C



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES

YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FOR PARENTS/LEGAL GUARDIANS

WHO WILL BE DOING THIS RESEARCH?

My name is Kristina Eisenbach. I am a masters student with the Sociology & Anthropology Department at the University of Guelph. I am conducting this study as a requirement in completing my M.A. degree. If at any time you have questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact me at 519-829-8157. My advisor, Dr. Belinda Leach, Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology, may also be reached at bleach@uoguelph.ca.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ALL ABOUT?

I have invited your son/daughter to participate in a research study which explores the life experiences of youth volunteers in your area. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into young people's lives within rural Ontario, and to learn about the impact that volunteering may have on their connections to the community. I aim to identify some of the social challenges that young people face in rural areas, and to understand how volunteering affects the ways in which they deal with such challenges.

WHAT WILL THIS RESEARCH DO?

This research will draw attention to the social needs and concerns of youth within your area of rural Ontario. It is hoped that findings will aid policy-makers and community leaders in making decisions that best support local youth activities.

HOW WILL YOUR CHILD BE INVOLVED?

In participating in this research, your child will be asked to complete an individual interview which will last for approximately one hour. Only your child and I will be present during these interviews. I'll be audio-recording our session; however, no one will have access to these records but myself and Dr. Leach.

My audio device, as well as any notes and recordings I may take will be stored in a locked and secure location. The computer I use will also be electronically encrypted to ensure your child's privacy. After five years, all of the data I have gathered will be permanently destroyed.

WHO WILL KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILD SAYS?

The information that your child shares with me is completely confidential.* I will not tell anyone what he/she has said, and he/she will not be identified in my final results.

**The only thing I would be legally required to report is a) if your child advised me that he/she was planning on hurting him/herself, b) if your son/daughter advised me that they were planning on hurting someone else, or c) if he/she reported that they were being abused.*

DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

Absolutely not. It is the choice of you and your child whether or not he/she will participate in this study. If your child decides to participate, he/she may withdraw at any time without any consequences. If you or your child would like his/her information removed from the study, I will do so directly. You are not waiving any legal claims or rights because of your child's participation in this research study.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

| | | |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| Research Ethics Officer | Telephone: | (519) 824-4120 ext. 56606 |
| University of Guelph | E-mail: | sauld@uoguelph.ca |
| 437 University Centre | Fax: | (519) 821-5236 |
| Guelph, ON N1G 2W1 | | |

Signature of Participant's Legal Representative

I have read the information provided for the research as described in this letter. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Parent or Legal Guardian (please print)

Signature of Parent of Legal Guardian

Date

Kristina Eisenbach

Signature

APPENDIX D



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES

YOUTH VOLUNTEERISM IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FOR YOUTH LEADERS

WHO WILL BE DOING THIS RESEARCH?

My name is Kristina Eisenbach. I am a masters student with the Sociology & Anthropology Department at the University of Guelph. I am conducting this study as a requirement in completing my M.A. degree. If at any time you have questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact me at 519-829-8157. My advisor, Dr. Belinda Leach, Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology, may also be reached at bleach@uoguelph.ca.

WHAT IS THIS STUDY ALL ABOUT?

I am pleased to invite you to participate in a research study which explores the life experiences of youth volunteers in your area. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into young people's lives within rural Ontario, and to learn about the impact that volunteering may have on their connections to the community. I aim to identify some of the social challenges that young people face in rural areas, and to understand how volunteering affects the ways in which they deal with such challenges.

WHAT WILL THIS RESEARCH DO?

This research will draw attention to the social needs and concerns of youth within your area of rural Ontario. It is hoped that findings will aid policy-makers and community leaders in making decisions that best support local youth activities.

HOW WILL I BE INVOLVED?

In participating in this research, you will be asked to complete an individual interview which will last for approximately one hour. Only you and I will be present during these interviews. I'll be audio-recording our session; however, no one will have access to these records but myself and Dr. Leach.

My audio device, as well as any notes and recordings I may take will be stored in a locked and secure location. The computer I use will also be electronically encrypted to ensure your privacy. After five years, all of the data I have gathered will be permanently destroyed.

WHO WILL KNOW WHAT I SAY?

The information that you share with me is completely confidential.* I will not tell anyone what you have said, and you will not be identified in my final results.

**The only thing I would be legally required to report is a) if you told me you were planning on hurting yourself, b) if you told me you were planning on hurting someone else, or c) if you were being abused. If this was the case, I would encourage you to report this yourself and would support you in doing so.*

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

Absolutely not. It is your choice whether or not to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. If you would like your information removed from the study, I will do so directly. You are not waiving any legal claims or rights because of your participation in this research study.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

| | | |
|-------------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| Research Ethics Officer | Telephone: | (519) 824-4120 ext. 56606 |
| University of Guelph | E-mail: | sauld@uoguelph.ca |
| 437 University Centre | Fax: | (519) 821-5236 |
| Guelph, ON N1G 2W1 | | |

Signature of Research Participant

I have read the information provided for the research as described in this letter. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Kristina Eisenbach

Signature

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

Introduction

Hello _____. My name is Kristina Eisenbach, and I'm a masters student at the University of Guelph, currently studying with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Thank you again for being here today. As I've mentioned, this discussion is completely confidential, so anything you tell me will be kept in confidence, and you won't be personally identified in my final results. Also, you have the right to refuse any questions which you're not comfortable answering, and you can withdraw from this interview and/or this study at any time without consequences.

Questions

1. Can you please begin by telling me your name and your age?
2. Please tell me about the community in which you currently live. Where is it located, and what makes it unique?
3. Please tell me a little bit about your family life. Do you come from an agricultural background? How are your parents or guardians employed?
4. What are some of your responsibilities at home, and/or within your family?
5. What local volunteer organizations or clubs are you currently a member of?
6. How did you initially get involved with these organizations?
7. What does the word "rural" mean to you? What are your perceptions of "rural life"?
8. Do you consider yourself to be a "rural youth"? Why or why not?
9. What have you found to be the personal advantages of volunteering/club membership?
10. What have you found to be the personal disadvantages of volunteering/club membership?
11. What is your role within the organizations/clubs that you are a member of? What activities, expectations, and/or responsibilities have been assigned to you?

12. Do elder generations play a social, leadership, or administrative role in your organization? If so, how?
13. How (if at all) have your clubs/organizations connected you with outside community members, or with members of other community organizations?
14. In what ways (if any) does your club support youth within community forums, debates, or discussions?
15. Can you tell me about any experiences you may have had with mentor figures within your organizations/clubs? What made these experiences significant for you?
16. Can you please tell me about how your volunteer experiences have affected your friendships and social life?
17. Can you please tell me about how your volunteer experiences have affected your self-perception and/or self-esteem?
18. Approximately what percentage of your friends and peers are involved in volunteer organizations within the local area? If certain of your peers do not volunteer, why do you believe this to be the case?
19. What do you perceive to be the role(s) of youth within rural communities - socially, economically, and/or politically?
20. How do you perceive that elders view youth within your community? What roles (if any) do they attribute to local youth?
21. How do youth in your community perceive elder generations?
22. On a scale of 1 to 10, how strongly do you feel a sense of “membership” to your local community? Please explain.

23. How do you feel that volunteering/club involvement has affected your overall sentiments towards the local community?
24. What are your future plans within your community?
25. How have your plans for the future been shaped by your volunteer and/or club involvement?

APPENDIX F: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER LEADERS

Introduction

Hello _____. My name is Kristina Eisenbach, and I'm a masters student at the University of Guelph, currently studying with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Thank you again for being here today. As I've mentioned, this discussion is completely confidential, so anything you tell me will be kept in confidence, and you won't be personally identified in my final results. Also, you have the right to refuse any questions which you're not comfortable answering, and you can withdraw from this interview and/or this study at any time without consequences.

Questions

1. Can you please begin by telling me your name and your age?
2. Please tell me about the community in which you currently live. Where is it located, and what makes it unique?
3. Please tell me a little bit about your family life. Do you come from an agricultural background? How are you and your partner (if applicable) employed?
4. What local volunteer organizations or clubs are you currently a member of? In which of these organizations do you act as a youth leader?
5. How did you initially get involved with these organizations?
6. What inspires you to take on a leadership role within the organizations/clubs that you are a member of?
7. What does the word "rural" mean to you? What are your perceptions of "rural life"?
8. Do you consider yourself to be a "rural" individual? Why or why not?
9. What have you found to be the personal advantages of volunteering/club membership?
10. What have you found to be the personal disadvantages of volunteering/club membership?

11. What activities, expectations, and/or responsibilities have been assigned to you as a youth leader?
12. How (if at all) do your clubs/organizations connect youth with outside community members, or with members of other community organizations?
13. In what ways (if any) does your club support youth within community forums, debates, or discussions?
14. Can you tell me about specific experiences you have had as a mentor figure within your organizations/clubs? What made these experiences significant for you?
15. How do you think that volunteer involvement affects the friendships and social life of local young people? How are youths' social dynamics impacted by their participation or non-participation in local organizations?
16. How do you believe that volunteering affects youth's self-perception and/or self-esteem?
17. From your personal impressions, what percentage of local youth are involved in volunteer organizations?
18. What are the strategies that your organizations use to recruit youth members? Do you believe these strategies to be effective?
19. What factors may discourage youth from becoming involved in volunteer initiatives?
20. What do you perceive to be the overall role(s) of youth within rural communities - socially, economically, and/or politically?
21. In general, how do you perceive that elder generations view youth within your community? What roles (if any) are attributed to local youth?
22. How do youth in your community perceive elder generations?

23. How do you feel that volunteering/club involvement affects youth's overall sentiments towards the local community?
24. In your experience, how are youths' plans for the future shaped by volunteer and/or club involvement?