RURAL GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS AND THE EFFECT OF LIVING

IN A RURAL CONTEXT

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to better understand how young women in a rural community define successful adulthood and how life in a rural area benefited or challenged their transition into successful adulthood. Non-probability, purposive sampling was used to select a remote rural research site through the NCES classification system. Using a grounded theory approach, data were collected through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews from 10 girls in their sophomore, junior, or senior year of high school in a rural Texas community.

The participants defined success based on achievement, but recognized that the specific process of how success is achieved varies. Rural youth in this study identified common components of success: happiness, money, further education, a good job, and healthy relationships. Family members, school employees, and experiences youth had living in the rural community were all strong influences in developing youth's perceptions of success and future plans. Additionally, the participants in this study identified the impact of the rural context on their perceptions of success and plans for achievement. Rural youth in this study recognized they needed to leave the community to pursue educational, occupational, and economic opportunities.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the community and youth who inspire me each day to
try to live in a way that honors God and to do all I can to make the world better.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Youth are faced with many challenges as they grow into adulthood. They experience biological, cognitive, and social transitions, which can be difficult to navigate without appropriate, supportive resources (Steinberg, 2008). Many youth development organizations aim to provide these resources to youth through their programming. The prevalence of research in youth development has focused on interventions at the program level, such as after-school programming. Focusing on programs fails to adequately consider the influence of the broader community context on youth development. Additionally, the perspective of youth is also often ignored in research (Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2005). To enhance the effectiveness of youth development practice and expand our understanding of the influences on youth development, research that includes the perspectives of youth regarding the broader ecological contexts in which their development occurs is needed (Crockett, Shanahan, and Jackson-Newsom, 2000). Better understanding youth's perspective of their context may enhance researchers' and practitioners' understanding of the gaps in developmental resources and provide insight into how youth navigate community environments.

Barriers to resources have been studied (McGrath, 2001), but there is limited research on the role of resources from the perspective of youth (Moore, Jilcott, Shores, Evenson, Brownson, & Novick, 2010). The need for youth engagement is evidenced in the research; understanding what youth perceive to be barriers to potential developmental opportunities and supports will increase the effectiveness of youth

development programs (Walker, Marczak, Blyth, & Borden, 2005). Additionally, while a significant amount of youth development literature is focused on non-rural areas, rural areas often remain unexamined. Literature discusses the activities and experiences of rural residents, but the long-term, developmental impacts of living in rural areas on rural populations, especially on rural youth, deserves more consideration (Edwards & Matarrita-Cascante, 2011). Developing understanding of specific perspectives, such as that of rural youth, could contribute to policy and practice in a way that positively affects rural communities and increases the effectiveness of rural youth development efforts (Edwards & Matarrita-Cascante, 2011). Researchers have called for future studies to make practical contributions to rural development efforts and to address the "benefits and limitations of living in rural areas" (Edwards & Matarrita-Cascante, 2011, p. 465).

More than 25% of adolescents live in rural settings (Crockett et al., 2000) and over 20% of children in the United States attend rural public schools (Afterschool Alliance, 2007), making rural public schools an important avenue for youth development efforts. Youth living in rural areas and attending public schools often face many challenges (Pruitt, 2009). Rural areas tend to have lower educational achievement than national norms (Lichter, Roscigno, & Condron, 2003, p. 101). Additionally, youth from rural areas typically encounter higher levels of poverty than youth in urban areas (USDA Economic Research Service, 2013) and face many health and resource disparities (Afterschool Alliance, 2007; Atav & Spencer, 2002; Pettigrew, Miller-Day, Krieger, & Hecht, 2011; Pruitt, 2009; Yousefian, Ziller, Swartz, & Hartley, 2009).

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Rural communities are not without their challenges. However, research also has suggested some benefits of living in a rural area. These benefits are often centered on involvement and connectedness. Crockett et al. (2000) share that rates of school and community involvement for rural youth may be higher than for their urban counterparts, leading to increased psychological benefits. Rural youth are also more likely to be connected to their peers and have stronger community ties (Crockett et al, 2000; Hektner, 1995). This connectedness, however, can vary among farm and nonfarm adolescents (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995). Additionally, the homogeneity of some rural communities can impede adolescents who "do not fit the conventional mold" from making connections in their communities (Crockett et al., 2000, p. 49).

Youth development efforts may help alleviate some of the disparities rural youth face and build on the strengths of these rural communities. In youth development, both the outcomes and the overall process of healthy development are important. Providing adolescents with useful resources during their youth and their transition into adulthood is essential to increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. Additionally, since rural youth tend to face higher levels of poverty than their urban counterparts (USDA Economic Research Service, 2013), youth development efforts in rural communities are especially valuable; these services can provide youth with resources they may not otherwise be able to afford or access because of their poverty status.

Increasing access to useful youth development resources will benefit rural youth. To discover what resources are most beneficial, research needs to focus on the needs and experiences of youth living in the rural context. Though research on rural boys is also

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needed, this study will focus on rural girls. Differences in gender have been relevant in other studies of rural youth (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995); therefore, it is important to study each gender individually to best illuminate the specific experiences of and issues faced by rural girls.

Recent movement from deficit-based programming (i.e., where "fixing" youth's problems are the primary focus) to asset-based programming (i.e., where youth are seen as resources) has become prevalent in the field of youth development (Gambone & Connell, 2004; Steinberg, 2008; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Youth are considered most likely to attain positive outcomes when they are actively engaged in their own development process (Walker et al., 2005). This means that youth are active participants in all aspects of the process – formation, planning, implementation, and evaluation (Walker et al., 2005). Recognizing youth as resources allows them to be engaged participants who can contribute to positive programming outcomes (Martinek & Hellison, 1997; Walker et al., 2005). The recognition of youth as resources is essential to the success of youth development practice. To get youth fully engaged, it is important that we give them a chance to voice their perceptions of the range of youth development resources available and accessible to them, not just of specific youth programs. Giving youth opportunities to share their perceptions of the accessibility of resources may provide unique, useful insight that allows enhancement of youth development efforts.

Problem Statement

Literature indicates that community development and youth development are interdependent, each needing the other to succeed to fulfill their capacity (Brennan, Barnett, & Baugh, 2007; Seidl, Mulkey, & Blanton, 1999). Because of this interdependence, it is important that youth development is approached in the context of the community in which it takes place. Community capacity is developed when a community's resources are mobilized to detect and engage its own needs (Kelly & Caputo, 2006). The capacity of a community to provide certain resources affects the outcomes of youth development efforts. If attention is not given to the specific context of and issues faced by youth, youth development efforts are less likely to be successful and a significant part of community development will be lacking.

The ultimate goal of youth development practice has been to assist youth in developing into "fully functioning adults" (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003), but the characteristics associated with that phrase seem to vary among scholars (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). The idea of becoming a fully functioning adult is typically considered synonymous with achieving success in adulthood; fully functioning adults often are expected to be economically self-sufficient, have healthy social and family relationships, be physically healthy, and be involved in the community. Scholars may define what characterizes a fully functioning adult, but youth - including rural youth - may have different perceptions of what "success" as an adult means. Research shows that aspirations vary among youth (Bajema, Miller, & Williams, 2002) and that they change their aspirations to adapt to their context, such as

the perceived availability or lack of resources (Furstenberg, 1999). Therefore, it is important to consider the availability of resources through what youth understand is needed for success as an adult, recognizing the relevance of differences in context.

A community's availability or lack of resources and services may promote or hinder positive youth development. When youth development opportunities are lacking, the options youth have for exploration, skill recognition, and skill development are limited. This leads to a need to take an ecological approach to youth development – examining the environments "beyond the immediate setting… that affect events within the immediate setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 527) in which youth develop. This entails consideration and involvement of various stakeholders in youth's development (Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 2001; Witt, 2002), including youth themselves. Studying youth's perceptions of the challenges and benefits of living in their community through what youth perceive characterizes a successful adult offers important insight into the availability or lack of youth development services.

Research shows that rural youth have less access to recreation opportunities, less variation of programs from which to choose, and less access to transportation than urban youth (Afterschool Alliance, 2007; Bowman, Manoogian, & Driscoll, 2002; Brown, Swanson, & Barton, 2003; Edwards, Miller, & Blackburn, 2011; Hobbs, 1999; Lutfiyya, Lipsky, Wisdom-Behounek, & Inpanbutr-Martinkus, 2007; Moore et al., 2010). Additionally, youth living in rural areas have a higher risk of becoming obese than youth living in urban areas (Yousefian et al., 2009) and have a higher risk of pregnancy (Atav & Spencer, 2002). Rural youth also may be less likely to receive attention in youth

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development research and practice because of the existence of several misconceptions about growing up in a rural community. For example, common myths suggest that rural areas are immune to "urban" issues (e.g. drug use). However, studies show that youth from rural areas have higher rates of abuse of many substances than youth living in urban areas, including alcohol, tobacco, and "hard drugs," such as cocaine and methamphetamine (Pruitt, 2009). Rural youth also tend to begin drug use at an earlier age than their urban peers and are more likely to sell drugs (Pruitt, 2009). Youth in rural communities are faced with multiple barriers to their healthy development that are different than the experiences faced by many of their urban peers. Therefore, it is important that rural adolescents' perceptions be examined separately from the experiences of urban youth so that appropriate recognition can be given to the effect of context on the lives and developmental trajectories of rural youth.

Because of the differences in urban and rural contexts, researchers and practitioners may need to use different strategies for youth development that give attention to the interplay of the youth and his or her socioecological environment. Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model helps provide clarity and insight when studying rural youth. The socioecological model suggests that there are different systems and subsystems in which a person develops and helps separate the systems and subsystems impacting rural youth. This separation can help researchers and youth practitioners break down the impact of context into manageable elements that may be able to be used in a way that creates a positive outcome in youth development work.

Context significantly affects the lives of youth, as the differing experiences of rural and urban youth evidences. Gender also affects the lives of adolescents (Pettigrew et al., 2011) and has been found to be significant in multiple studies (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995; Yousefian et al., 2009). Because of the differing experiences and variations in effectiveness of programs due to gender (Ball & Moore, 2008; McIlhaney et al., 2011), to better understand the challenges and benefits of living in a rural area, studying genders individually may be more beneficial than grouping genders together. Additionally, some research calls for the exclusive inclusion of girls' perceptions due to perception variations among genders (Hall, Kulig, & Kalischuk, 2011). Giving attention to the perceptions of girls helps increase understanding of the resources available to and the challenges faced by them, potentially allowing youth development practitioners to form more effective programs (McIlhaney et al., 2011). Research also suggests that girls growing up in rural communities have different aspirations and expectations placed upon them than do boys (Andres, Anisef, Krahn, Looker, & Thiessen, 1999). Though research on rural boys is also needed, this study will focus on rural girls to help elucidate the compounded effects of gender and context.

Since this study is exploratory in nature and the goal is to better understand rural girls' perceptions and experiences, qualitative research methods will be used. Qualitative methods are needed to move toward the goal of "discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Specifically, a grounded theory approach will assist in beginning to build a theory from the data regarding youth's perceptions of

success and the influence of context. The use of a grounded theory approach in this study may help youth development researchers and practitioners through providing insight, increasing understanding, and offering direction for future actions and research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Research Questions

The question this research aims to answer is: how do rural girls define and perceive success in adulthood and how does living in a rural community assist or inhibit them in reaching successful adulthood? The following issues will be examined:

- What are the attributes participants perceive to be indicators of successful adulthood?

- How do the perceived availability and accessibility of resources in their community affect their perceptions of successful adulthood?

Significance of Study

This study presents youth perspectives concerning the benefits and challenges of living in a rural area based on what the girls perceive characterizes a successful adult. Many programs or interventions are conducted without considering the impacts of youth's socioecological context or involving youth in the development and implementation process, though they are valuable stakeholders and resources in youth development efforts (Brademas & Weber, 1999; Brennan et al., 2007; Campbell & Edwards, 2012; Seidl et al., 1999). By not understanding youth's perceptions of success

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or the influence of the scocioecological context, the likelihood that youth development efforts will achieve expected outcomes may be lessened. Establishing cognizant goals of youth development efforts that consider the perspectives of youth and the impact of the community context will help to ensure relevance of and support for youth development practice. The inclusion of youth's perceptions provides information that may allow for more effective programs to be created and implemented in the future and for current programs to be better understood and improved. By embracing the local perspectives and knowledge of an area's residents or a programs' participants and acknowledging youth's varying goals and characterizations of successful adulthood, capacity for youth development, community acceptance and support of programs, and the success of youth development programs may increase (Campbell & Edwards, 2012; Gruidl & Hustedde, 2003; Korten, 1980; Wendel, Burdine, McLeroy, Alaniz, Norton, & Felix, 2009).

Glossary of Terms

Adolescence does not have a universally agreed upon definition at this time. In this study, an **adolescent** is defined as someone between the ages of 10 and 24. Girls between the ages of 13 and 19 are the focus of this study. This encompasses most age groups included in definitions used by many prominent organizations (Grace & Patrick, 1994).

The defining characteristics of a rural location are disagreed upon among scholars. Data collection and analysis often occurs at the county-level, which can create misinterpretations of rural area issues and lead to inadequate data collection efforts

(Tickamyer, 2000), causing unreliable research conclusions and poor management of resources (Isserman, 2005). Research regarding rural areas can also be faulty due to the lack of a clear definition of "rural" (Provasnik et al., 2007). However, working with the Census Bureau and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) developed a system in which differing levels of urban, suburban, and rural areas are defined (Provasnik et al., 2007). The NCES system separates urban, suburban, and rural areas into three subcategories each, separating rural areas into the categories of fringe, distant, or remote areas (Provosnik et al., 2007). This helps address the problem of defining rurality by recognizing differences among rural areas. Since the goal of this study is to examine the perspectives of young women in a rural community, considering the impacts of their socioecological environment, a remote rural ecological context helps to emphasize differences from urban areas. Therefore, the **rural location** in this study is classified as a Remote Rural Area in the NCES system – a "rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster" (Provasnik et al., 2007, p. 2).

The ultimate goal of youth development practice is to provide supports, opportunities, programs, and services (SOPS) to youth through methods that enhance positive youth development and assist youth in becoming healthy, fully-functioning human beings (Pittman et al., 2003; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). **Supports** are defined as "Motivational, emotional, and strategic supports to succeed in life [that are] affirming, respectful, and ongoing [and] offered by a variety of people" (Witt & Caldwell, 2005, p. 3), while **opportunities** are "chances for young people to learn how to act in the world

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around them, to explore, express, earn, belong, and influence… to test ideas and behaviors and to experiment with different roles" (Witt & Caldwell, 2005, p. 3). **Services** and **programs** are provided in areas concerning education, health, and employment and demonstrate an educational aspect while providing supports and opportunities (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). In other words, services intentionally provide supports and opportunities to youth, often through programs, with the intent of positively affecting their development.

The literature often used in studying and teaching youth development typically defines SOPS and other terms in specific ways to allow for comparison across studies. However, it is important to leave these definitions open to changes. If youth, for example, do not define supports, opportunities, programs, and services in the same way researchers do, then the definitions being used may be misguiding research questions or causing investigators to misinterpret the responses of participants. The definitions of SOPS are certainly not the only terms to which this applies. In this study, the definitions of success and adulthood are also intentionally left undefined. It is important, to gain insight into what youth actually perceive and are trying to convey, to form a shared foundation for what they mean when using certain terms or responding to questions regarding such terms.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand the perceptions of a group of adolescent girls in a rural community of what characterizes a successful adult. Understanding these perceptions assists in promoting youth development through providing information which will allow for the creation and implementation of effective youth services. This literature review provides an introduction to the field of youth development and examines gaps in the literature. It discusses the effects of context, ideas of successful adulthood and aspirations, the interaction between community and youth development, the effects of rurality, experiences of rural youth, impacts of gender, and the compounded effects of rurality and gender on rural girls.

Youth Development

Youth development is a field of research and practice which focuses on improving the lives of youth and aiding youth's transition into successful adulthood. Recent shifts in attitude and practice in the field have occurred, moving from youth being seen as problems to be managed to seeing youth as capable of developing skills and as being resources (Gambone & Connell, 2004; Steinberg, 2008; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). To facilitate the healthy development of youth, youth development efforts provide supports, opportunities, programs, and services in a purposeful manner to assist youth in developing the emotional, mental, physical, spiritual, and social skills needed to

cope in a healthy way with various situations (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Youth development programs also help provide for three of youth's fundamental needs: "people to talk to, places to go, and opportunities to explore" (Witt, 2002, p. 5).

History and Shifts in Methods

Beginning in the late 1800's, Jane Addams worked toward providing safe places for youth to live, grow, and develop. Her work, as did the work of others who followed, focused on helping youth avoid the problems associated with youth living in urban areas (Addams, 1909). Since then, many organizations which serve youth have developed. These organizations, however, tend to still be centered on urban youth's lives and experiences and are urban-based. Even organizations such as 4-H, which is often considered an agriculturally- and therefore rural-based youth organization – often targets their efforts on urban youth. This leaves the unique effects of the rural context and culture out of many youth development efforts, which can cause some national programs to be rendered ineffective (Pruitt, 2009). While urban-based programs implemented in rural areas have had some benefits, programs for rural youth which are contextually-based may gain even better results from youth development efforts.

In addition to the need for contextually-based efforts in rural areas, it is important to consider the perspective shifts in youth development practice that are occurring, which lead to avoiding problems-based or deficit approaches to working with youth and, instead, seeing youth as assets. In the beginning years of youth development practice,

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these approaches tended to assume that "there [was] something wrong with the individual" and focused on correcting youth's negative behaviors (Witt, 2002, p. 2). Witt and Caldwell (2005) write about the need to move from a deficit perspective of youth – where the problems with youth are the constant focus - to an assets perspective of youth – where youth are seen as resources and the focus is on developing and utilizing positive skills and characteristics of youth to improve youth's lives and positively affect their communities.   Gambone & Connell (2004) also discuss the inadequacies of having a deficit perspective, which they refer to as taking a "prevention approach," and call for the use of the equivalent of an assets-based model, which focuses on promoting positive outcomes for youth instead of simply decreasing negative behavior. A shift from deficit based programming to asset based programming has become prevalent in the field of youth development recently (Gambone & Connell, 2004; Steinberg, 2008; Witt & Caldwell, 2005), though it is not yet fully evident or implemented in all youth programs (Witt, 2002).

Supports, Opportunities, Programs, and Services

Youth development advocates aim to facilitate youth's development into healthy adults through the use of supports, opportunities, programs, and services (SOPS) (Pittman et al., 2003; Witt, 2002; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). In some literature, there is no distinction noted among programs and services, so programs are left out (forming the acronym "SOS" instead) (Pittman et al., 2003; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Services are provided in areas concerning education, health, and employment and demonstrate an

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educational aspect while intentionally providing supports and opportunities, often through programs, to youth with the intent of positively affecting their development (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Supports are defined as "Motivational, emotional, and strategic supports to succeed in life [that are] affirming, respectful, and ongoing [and] offered by a variety of people" (Witt & Caldwell, 2005, p. 3). Opportunities are "chances for young people to learn how to act in the world around them, to explore, express, earn, belong, and influence… to test ideas and behaviors and to experiment with different roles" (Witt & Caldwell, 2005, p. 3). Supports and opportunities may exist outside of organizations in many communities, but youth development organizations deliberately employ supports and opportunities to assist youth in avoiding harmful behavior and to encourage them to make choices that enhance positive development through attaining assets and building skills (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

Recognizing Youth as Resources Enhances Youth Development

Asset based programming and positive youth development efforts enhance youth development practices through recognizing youth as resources. Youth are considered most likely to attain positive outcomes when they are actively engaged in their own development process (Walker et al., 2005). This means that youth are active participants in all aspects of the process – formation, planning, implementation, and evaluation (Walker et al., 2005). Recognizing youth as resources allows them to be engaged participants who can contribute to positive programming outcomes (Martinek & Hellison, 1997; Walker et al., 2005). Healthy development necessitates the application

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of skills gained by youth (Pittman et al., 2003, Witt, 2002). The recognition of youth as resources is essential to the success of youth development practice. To get youth to be fully engaged, it is important that we give youth a chance to voice their perceptions, not only of specific youth programs, but of the range of youth development resources available and accessible to them.

Limitations of Current Research Regarding Youth Development

The youth development field has limited literature that exclusively focuses on the youth development discipline. Therefore, to understand youth development, it is necessary to consider literature from multiple disciplines that study youth. Even when giving consideration to multiple disciplines' literature, many gaps exist within the literature which facilitates the knowledge base for youth development efforts. Further understanding of what facilitates and characterizes a healthy transition to adulthood is needed (Witt, 2002). Additionally, there is a gap in the literature concerning the impacts of living in rural areas on rural populations (Edwards & Matarrita-Cascante, 2011). Research focusing on the effects of living in a rural area is needed to facilitate better programs and services (Moore et al., 2010). In addition to the need for more research on rural populations, more studies are needed that increase our understanding of rural youth issues (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Scholars note the importance of studying the supports and barriers perceived by rural youth (Yousefian et al., 2009), but there is a limited amount of research on the aspirations of subpopulations of rural youth (Bajema et al., 2002). Exactly what youth perceive as supports and barriers needs to be further

examined. Though some research has been conducted using rural youth's perceptions (Yousefian et al., 2009), more is necessary (Hall et al., 2011). Scholars also suggest studying the impact of gender in future research (Pettigrew et al., 2011) and call for the inclusion of girls' perceptions in future studies (Hall et al., 2011). Pettigrew et al. (2011) suggest studying the impact and interactions of both gender and rurality on adolescents in future research.

Context

Context is immensely important to the development of programs and the positive development of youth (Walker et al., 2005). The lives of young people "…are shaped by the communities and people who surround them as they grow up" (Carr and Kefalas, 2009, p. xiv). Multiple researchers stress the need for getting to know the environment in which youth live and develop, being responsive to context, and making an effort to gain insight into youth's experiences (Walker et al., 2005; Witt, 2002). It is important to strive to increase the understanding and insight of youth development practitioners and researchers regarding youth's perceptions of their experiences and communities.

Scholars note that context impacts youth's lives (Crockett et al., 2000; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Differences in cultural contexts may cause "blueprint" programs – programs which are replicated without adjusting for cultural variations (Korten, 1980) - to be ineffective (Pruitt, 2009). Thus, youth development efforts should take an ecological approach to youth's development - "[taking] into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514) in which

the youth is developing. Considering ecological development of youth requires paying

attention to and involving various stakeholders, community members, and organizations

with which the youth interacts, including families, neighbors, schools, religious

institutions, and other youth and community organizations (Connell et al. 2001; Witt,

2002). This can enhance understanding about youth's experiences, perceptions, and

needed skills, allowing programs to be developed which meet youth's needs (Walker et

al., 2005).

      Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model (1994) helps provide clarity and insight

when studying rural youth due to the impact of the rural context. The socioecological

model suggests that there are different systems and subsystems in which a person

develops. The immediate environment a person is in is called a microsystem.

Microsytems are contained in mesosytems. A mesosystem is the interaction of two

microsystems which affect a person. The combination of a mesosystem and another area

the person is not directly in, but which immediately affects the person, forms an

exosystem. Macrosystems are the mostly immediate culture in which the person lives

and contains microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems. Finally, a chronosystem

involves the time and place in history in which a person lives, which influences each

subsystem. Bronfenbrenner also discussed the impact of proximal processes, which he

explained are "enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment"

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 38). For rural youth, an example of the microsystem might be

the school a youth attends.

School-home communication may function as a mesosystem, while a youth's parent's occupational environment may combine with that mesosystem to create an exosystem. For rural youth, the rural community may be a macrosystem. All of the subsystems would be impacted by the chronosystem. Additionally, proximal processes may be evidenced through building positive relationships with community members or school employees. Bronfenbrenner's model helps separate the systems and subsystems impacting rural youth, which can help researchers and youth practitioners break down the impact of context into manageable elements that may be able to be used in a way that creates a positive outcome.

Successful Adulthood

Becoming a fully functioning adult is a common goal of youth development practice, though the characteristics and achievements associated with that phrase seem to vary among scholars (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Most researchers pattern their definitions in some manner after Furstenberg's indicators - "physical and mental health, social involvement, and economic self-sufficiency and productivity" (1999, p. 9) - but variations do occur. Gambone and Connell (2004) suggest that successful youth development outcomes in adulthood include community involvement, healthy social relationships, and being self-sufficient economically. Lerner, Fisher, and Weinberg (2000) stated desirable outcomes of adulthood as the possession of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring in certain areas or manners. Some research identifies a sixth outcome – contribution (Lerner et al.,

2005, Pittman et al., 2003). Connell et al. (2001) broadly encompass the ideas in the other definitions through characterizing healthy adults as making a positive contribution to society, forming connections with others, and having the ability to navigate the complexities of adult life.

It is important to understand what characterizes a successful transition to adulthood (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Even though scholars may describe a working definition of a fully functioning adult, youth may have differing perceptions of what "success" as an adult means in their lives. Though Ley, Nelson, and Beltyukova (1996) suggest that residents of rural areas seem to have unified goals for a successful adulthood, other research shows that educational aspirations and occupational goals vary among youth (Bajema et al., 2002) and suggests that contextual differences can affect youth's perceptions of success and development of goals (Furstenberg, 1999). Acknowledging youth's varying goals and characterizations of successful adulthood will help more accurately identify the resources most beneficial to communities. When what qualifies someone as a "fully functioning" or successful adult is assumed without recognizing the relevance of differences in context, important information may be overlooked, which can impact the effectiveness of youth development services. Therefore, it is important to consider the availability of youth development resources through the lens of what youth perceive is needed for success as an adult.

Community Development and Youth Development

The health of a society is affected by the condition of its communities (Checkoway, 1995). Literature indicates that community development and youth development are interdependent, each needing the other to succeed so that their capacity may be fulfilled (Brennan et al., 2007; Seidl et al., 1999). For society to be healthy, successful youth development efforts are needed. At the same time, the success of youth development efforts is deeply affected by the larger community's development and receptiveness (Camino, 2000). Therefore, it is essential that youth development is approached in a context specific manner, giving due attention to the environment in which youth development is taking place.

Communities need to be attentive to, and advocate for, youth development efforts. Many potential benefits to the larger community are available through youth development services. For example, engaging youth in the community through youth development efforts can give the community "new life" (McKoy, 2007). When youth are recognized as assets, they can often provide valuable resources to the community, such as time, enthusiasm, and active engagement – all things which enhance the capacity of communities (Brademas & Weber, 1999; Brennan et al., 2007; Wendel et al., 2009).

In addition to benefitting the larger community, effective youth development efforts can also provide abundant benefits to youth within a community (Collins, Bronte-Tinkew, & Logan, 2008). Multiple researchers note that youth development programming that includes community involvement benefits youth (Brennan et al., 2007; Camino, 2000; Witt, 2002; Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Youth development efforts

involving the community can help youth find a place in, learn how to make positive

contributions to, and increase youth's engagement in the community (Brennan et al.,

2007). Increased knowledge and the development of skills may occur (Brennan et al.,

2007). Additionally, the supports and opportunities provided through youth

development can assist youth in becoming "successful" or "fully functioning adults"

(Witt & Caldwell, 2005).

Rurality

The rural context is unique (Yousefian et al., 2009) and challenging to define

(Crockett et al., 2000). Rural America has experienced many changes in recent years,

including shifts in occupations and decreases in isolation from more urban areas

(Crockett et al., 2000; USDA Economic Research Service, 1997). One prominent issue

for rural communities in recent years is the diminishing rural population (USDA

Economic Research Service, 2013a; USDA Economic Research Service, 1997),

especially the outmigration of residents with higher education experience and special

skills. Rural communities, however, often possess many beneficial characteristics which

can enhance youth development efforts and eventually increase community capacity if

employed appropriately. These issues and characteristics contribute to the importance of

considering the effects of rurality on residents of rural areas.

Defining Rural

Urban and rural provide the basis for many comparisons (Tickamyer, 2000), but research on rural areas and resulting comparisons can be impaired by the lack of a clear definition of "rural" (Provasnik et al., 2007). Rurality is a much-debated concept, with definitions that are at times arbitrarily determined and inconsistent (Crockett et al., 2000). Rurality is defined by some as referencing a population and by others as referring to a location (Edwards & Matarrita-Cascante, 2011). Other scholars state that urban and rural definitions may include "population size and density, land use, and [an] economic base" (Tickamyer, 2000, p. 806). However, with the many definitions that exist, there is no agreed-upon, operationalized way of defining rurality (Isserman, 2005; Tickamyer, 2000). This leads to insufficient data collection efforts (Tickamyer, 2000), which facilitate a misunderstanding of rural area issues, causing false research conclusions and failures in managing resources (Isserman, 2005).

Often, data are collected or analyzed at the county-level, which can be problematic and inaccurate. An often-used form of measurement comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, which defines urban and rural dichotomously, considering rural areas to be those areas which are "not urban" (Isserman, 2005, p. 465). Specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau considers areas with less than 2,500 residents and less than 500 people per square mile to be rural (2013; USDA Economic Research Service, 2007). Census data are often analyzed at the county level. Another often-used determinant of rural and urban classification comes from the Office of Management and Budget (2010), which focuses on an area's relationship with other places, defining areas and collecting data at

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the county level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Because counties typically have a mixture of rural and non-rural areas (Isserman, 2005; USDA, 2012), this method can lead to an exclusion of many rural people from being considered as part of the rural population (Isserman, 2005) through discounting mostly rural counties that are included in what are defined as metropolitan areas because of the percentage of residents who commute to work in the urban areas (Office of Management and Budget, 2010). These issues can lead to inadequate data collection efforts (Tickameyer, 2000) and create misunderstandings of rural issues, causing flawed research conclusions and management of resources (Isserman, 2005).

The NCES (National Center for Education Statistics), working with the Census Bureau and the OMB, formed a different measurement system which more clearly defines differing levels of urban, suburban, and rural areas without relying on county boundaries (Provasnik et al., 2007). To accomplish this, the NCES system further splits urban, suburban, and rural areas into three subcategories each, with rural areas split into the categories of fringe, distant, or remote areas (Provosnik et al., 2007). This helps address the problems of defining rurality by more clearly delineating differences among rural areas. Since the goal of this study was to research the perspectives of rural girls with respect to their ecological environment, an increasingly unique ecological context helps highlight differences from urban areas. Therefore, the **rural location** in this study will be classified as Remote Rural Area in the NCES system – a "rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster" (Provasnik et al., 2007, p. 2).

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There are limitations in using the NCES definition. Not only are rural areas different than urban areas, rural areas vary among themselves. In addition, the people within rural areas and the contexts rural areas exist in and create for youth differ. Therefore, the results of this study are not generalizable to all rural girls. However, this study, using this definition, may bring about an increased understanding of the ways some rural girls view their world.

Changes in Population

In 2011, over 51 million residents, 16 percent of the United States' population, resided in nonmetropolitan areas (USDA Economic Research Service, 2013a). In 1990, 21 percent of the population lived in rural areas (USDA Economic Research Service, 2013a). This decrease likely has resulted from residents being compelled to leave due to the limited opportunities for formal education and varied employment, as well as the decline in more traditional farming and manufacturing opportunities in their home communities (Carr and Kefalas, 2009; Crockett et al., 2000; USDA Economic Research Service, 1997a). Thus, rural areas are increasingly experiencing the loss of formally educated or highly skilled residents, a phenomenon known as the "brain drain" (Afterschool Alliance, 2007; Carr and Kefalas, 2009). This exodus of educated people from rural areas harms the overall capacity of rural communities and is troubling for long-term community development efforts (Alliance, 2007; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Haller & Virkler, 1993; Howley, Harmon, & Leopold, 1996).

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For rural areas to survive, their rural community's capacity must be increased. An important part of a community's capacity includes the young people who grow up in the area. All rural youth must eventually make a decision to remain in their home community or to leave. Rural residents who do stay face many challenges as the rural environment continues to change (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Crockett et al., 2000). Those who leave must decide whether to return or to continue their life elsewhere. According to Carr and Kefalas (2009), the proportion of resources invested in youth who leave is higher than the resources invested in the youth who stay or return. This is problematic because the resources are basically being flushed from the area.

Carr and Kefalas (2009) suggest that investing in those who stay in the rural area rather than expending the majority of resources on those who "achieve and leave" is beneficial (Wright, 2012, p. 10) and is necessary to facilitate the health of rural communities. Communities can also combat the rural brain drain through providing people with economic reasons to reside in rural areas, such as increasing career opportunities, offering educational experiences that are applicable to community issues, and increasing technological assets (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). However, these processes take time, are complex, and do not look the same from one rural community to the next.

Considering the Rural Context in Programming

In research and programming, effective responses to disparities and other issues require a consideration of context (Pruitt, 2009), such as the effects of living in a rural area. When approaching programming in rural areas, a "one size fits all" approach does

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not give appropriate consideration to the unique benefits of and challenges faced by people living in rural areas (Yousefian et al., 2009). Differences among rural-urban and rural-rural contexts may cause "blueprint" programs (Korten, 1980) to be unproductive (Pruitt, 2009). However, utilizing the assets possessed by rural communities may enhance development efforts within the community and increase the capacity of the community for youth and community development. Rural communities often are more likely than urban areas to face issues of poverty, leading to a lack of financial resources for community and youth development efforts (Afterschool Alliance, 2007; USDA Economic Research Service, 2013). However, when provided with appropriate resources, rural areas often possess many other qualities that can enhance development efforts, such as already-formed partnerships, a strong work ethic, and support from the community (Afterschool Alliance, 2007). As a result of the existing differences in experiences and opportunities resulting from variations in context, rural populations need to be examined separately from non-rural populations.

Rural Youth

In addition to focusing on rurality as an important distinctive factor, rural youth should also be examined as a separate subpopulation from urban youth and from rural adults. Clearly, adults and youth have differing experiences and face varying issues (Steinberg, 2008). Additionally, however, significant differences and disparities exist among subpopulations of youth (Witt & Caldwell, 2005), though youth are often treated as a fairly homogenous group (Whitlock, 2006). Since these differences exist,

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conducting research based on youth subpopulations is necessary (Witt & Caldwell, 2005).

Over one in four adolescents live in rural settings (Crockett et al., 2000) and over 20% of children in the United States attend rural public schools (Afterschool Alliance, 2007). This significant portion of the United States population that lives in rural areas faces many issues (Pruitt, 2009). Rural areas tend to have higher levels of poverty than urban areas (USDA Economic Research Service, 2013), leading to a need for greater attention to be given to rural youth (Afterschool Alliance, 2007). Though there are benefits of living in a rural community, the rural context does not alleviate negative outcomes due to poverty (Lichter, Roscigno, & Condron, 2003). Additionally, health and resource disparities exist between rural and urban communities. Atav & Spencer (2002) conducted a study of health risk behaviors, concluding that rural youth were most at-risk, compared to urban and suburban youth. Communities in rural areas typically have limited healthcare and social service infrastructures (Pruitt, 2009), possibly leading to rural populations' tendency to have less positive health outcomes than urban populations (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Youth living in rural areas have a higher risk of becoming obese than youth living in urban areas (Yousefian at al., 2009) and have limited access to nutrition education and physical activity programming (Afterschool Alliance, 2007).

Common myth also suggests there are few drug or violence issues in rural areas. In reality, issues of substance abuse and violence are often concerns for rural youth (Hall et al., 2011), along with issues of isolation (Afterschool Alliance, 2007). Youth from

rural areas have higher rates of abuse of many substances than youth living in urban areas, including alcohol, tobacco, and "hard drugs," such as cocaine and methamphetamine (Pruitt, 2009). Rural youth also typically begin drug use at an earlier age than their urban peers and are more likely to sell drugs (Pruitt, 2009). One study suggested that 34% of youth had high levels of symptoms of depression (Peden, Reed, & Rayens, 2005). Rural populations have higher suicide rates than urban populations (Hirsch, 2006) and research shows that suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth (Hallfors, Waller, Ford, Halpern, Brodish, & Iritani, 2004). Due to the prevalence of these issues in rural areas, it is appropriate that Atav & Spencer (2002) conclude there should be more emphasis on "the relationship between residence and health risk behaviors" so more effective programming can be offered to rural youth (p. 53).

Resources

Youth development efforts can help youth in rural communities overcome many of the cyclical issues faced in these areas (e.g., poverty) and access opportunities which facilitate their healthy development (Afterschool Alliance, 2007). There are several barriers to positive youth development efforts, however, that are increasingly prevalent in rural areas (Campbell & Edwards, 2012; Collins et al., 2008). Though common ideas of rural communities suggest otherwise, rural residents often do not have adequate access to outdoor recreational opportunities (Yousefian et al., 2009). In addition, rural areas often lack resources for programming (Churchill, Clark, Prochaska-Cue, Creswell, & Ontai-Grzebik, 2007; Pruitt, 2009), resulting in less access to recreation opportunities

than urban youth possess and less variation of programs from which to choose (Afterschool Alliance, 2007; Bowman et al., 2002; Brown et al., 2003; Collins et al., 2008; Hobbs, 1999; Lutfiyya et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2010).

Funding is an issue for a majority of youth development organizations (Seidl et al., 1999), but especially those in rural areas. City-funded recreational resources can often facilitate youth development efforts, but rural areas tend to lack financing for professional leadership and coordination of what recreation resources do exist (Brademas & Weber, 1999). Transferring the cost onto the community or participants often makes it difficult for youth development efforts in rural communities to be sustainable, considering rural communities often have higher rates of poverty than urban areas (Afterschool Alliance, 2007; USDA Economic Research Service, 2013), which limits the sources available to fund youth programming. This lack of funding also impacts the availability of transportation for rural youth programs. Rural youth also often lack transportation to and from programs, which decreases their accessibility to youth development programs (Churchill et al., 2007; Esterman & Hedlund, 1995; Yousefian, 2009). Though many youth in rural settings do not live on a farm, farm youth, specifically, are less likely to participate in school and community activities than their peers from non-farm families (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995), likely due to farms typically existing farther from programming sites than the homes of non-farm families. Because of the typical distance from programs and the isolated paths characteristic of rural areas, walking to programs is often unreasonable and perceived as unsafe (Yousefian et al., 2009), limiting youth's accessibility to youth development efforts.

Along with funding difficulties, several other barriers exist which are problematic to rural youth development efforts. Rural youth face issues of isolation, lack role models, and have limited access to resources and opportunities for exploration, skill recognition, and skill development (Afterschool Alliance, 2007; Elbert & Alston, 2005). Having access to a variety of learning opportunities could provide youth with the information they need to make better, more informed choices about their life and their goals (Ley et al., 1996). However, because of the reality that a diverse range of career options are rarely found in rural areas (Rojewski, Wicklein, & Schell, 1995), rural youth often lack occupational role models and local opportunities to learn about careers (Bajema et al., 2002). These limited resources and opportunities can be detrimental to the preparedness of youth for potential future occupations. In addition to a lack of exposure to and interaction with a diverse range of employment opportunities, youth from rural areas face many stereotypes that deride their intelligence (Howley et al., 1996). Stereotypes perpetuated through negative perceptions and societal expectations can lead to a devaluing of rural youth, which can affect youth's opportunities and aspirations (Rojewski et al., 1995).

Aspirations

In rural areas, not all people or even a majority necessarily have a strong agricultural history, so it is important not to make that assumption and expect youth to aspire to or identify with agricultural occupations. Even when youth do identify with agricultural pursuits, research shows that the trend of continuing to run family farms is

decreasing. Youth from farm families "seem unlikely to plan on continuing with farming as an occupation, a change from the past when adolescents raised on farms frequently planned on taking over the family farm in their parent's retirement" (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995, p. 89). Though many may not want to take over the farm, they may still want to live in a rural area. It is relevant to consider that youth may not be interested in agricultural pursuits or simply do not see farming as a viable, or as the most viable, option for their future. Because of the uncertainty of the future of family farms, aspiring to pursue a formal education and non-farming occupation is common among rural youth (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995).

It is important not to make assumptions about the careers rural youth are interested in pursuing; however, research does suggest that rural youth typically have lower aspirations for educational and occupational attainment than youth from urban areas (Backman, 1990; Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989). While some scholars suggest that youth often "aspire to what they know" (Bajema et al., 2002, p. 62), Esterman & Hedlund (1995) suggest that some youth adapt their interests, values, and social activities to compensate for other experiences they have lacked. Rural youth further adapt their goals and perceptions of success based on their community context (Howley et al., 1996). Some research suggests that rural youth are faced with conflicting aspirations (Wright, 2012) more often than suburban and urban youth (Hektner, 1995). This may lead to the perceptions of seniors in one study indicating "resignation or frustration over decisions about postsecondary education and work" (Rojewski, 1995, p. 98).

Research suggests that commitment to the rural area was commonly explored when discussing youth's goals of further education (Wright, 2012). Youth in rural areas may highly value their communities and want to be committed to the community's success (Wright, 2012), but may perceive that their only choice is to pursue higher education or a career in an urban area (Hektner, 1995; Howley et al., 1996; Rojewski et al., 1995; Wright, 2012). This leads many youth from rural areas to move away and not return (Afterschool Alliance, 2007; Haller & Virkler, 1993; Howley et al., 1996). However, while recognizing the lack of opportunities available, some youth plan to return to their rural communities after receiving their degrees (Wright, 2012). These youth often have "a vision for their communities" (p. 6) and pursue degrees that allow them to address needs in their community (Wright, 2012). Additionally, researchers note that some people tend to refrain from completing advanced degrees when local job requirements typically do not require higher levels of education (Wright, 2012).

Gender

In addition to the impact of rural areas on the lives of youth, gender significantly affects adolescents' lives (Yousefian et al., 2009). Existing research shows that some youth development programs work for one gender and not the other (Ball & Moore, 2008). To better understand the experiences and perceptions of girls, studying genders individually will likely be more beneficial than grouping genders together.

Differences in gender have been found to be significant in multiple studies (Yousefian et al., 2009). Gender differences in maturity exist, with girls tending to be

more mature at an earlier age than males (Rojewski et al., 1995). Additionally, girls often possess aspirations that are easily affected by certain barriers, such as pregnancy and other health issues, which differ from barriers encountered by males (McIlhaney et al., 2011). Such differences among youth lead to a need for research and youth services to be oriented to address youth's needs (Walker et al., 2005), with attention given to the variations in effective programming practices targeting girls and boys (Ball & Moore, 2008; McIlhaney et al., 2011). Overcoming some obstacles and facing some barriers that girls encounter may be achieved more effectively through the use of a different process than the methods which are most effective in youth development for males (Ball & Moore, 2008; McIlhaney et al., 2011).

These variations in effectiveness may occur due to the differing perceptions among boys and girls. In addition to facing barriers to a different degree than boys, some scholars note that girls perceive some issues and causes differently than boys and call for an increase in the inclusion of girls' perceptions in future studies (Hall et al., 2011). Giving attention to the perceptions of girls will help increase understanding of the resources available to and the challenges faced by them, potentially allowing youth development practitioners to form more effective programs (McIlhaney et al., 2011).

Rural Girls

Gender has significant effects on the lives of adolescents (Pettigrew et al., 2011, Yousefian et al., 2009), including rural youth (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995). Girls face distinct issues and experience some barriers to healthy development differently than

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male youth (McIlhaney et al., 2011). For example, experiences in education and occupations differ for rural boys and rural girls (Rojewski et al., 1995). Girls in rural areas have limited economic options (Peden et al., 2005). Additionally, the rate of pregnancy nearly doubles for rural girls compared to their urban and suburban cohort (Atav & Spencer, 2002). Research also suggests that girls growing up in rural communities have differing aspirations than boys and often have different expectations placed upon them (Andres, Anisef, Krahn, Looker, & Thiessen, 1999). The differing experiences, aspirations, and perceptions of rural boys and girls (Andres et al., 1999; Esterman & Hedlund, 1995) lead to a need to direct specific attention to perceptions of young women; paying attention to rural girls' perceptions may increase understanding of the resources available to and the challenges faced by them. Though research on rural boys is also needed, this study will focus on rural girls to help illuminate the compounded effects of gender and context by examining how they define successful adulthood and how living in a rural area contributes or acts as a barrier in their transition to successful adulthood.

Summary

Youth development is a lengthy, continuous, and complex process (Witt, 2002), with many areas of research still needing attention. Specifically, the effects of rurality and gender on youth's lives deserve more consideration. Though rural areas face many issues, through accessing the strengths of rural communities, youth programs can help youth in rural communities break negative cycles and access opportunities and resources

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which facilitate healthy development (Afterschool Alliance, 2007). The experiences and perceptions of young women regarding developmental resources accessible to them are also important. My study will focus on better understanding the perceptions of a group of adolescent girls from a rural community and their perceptions of the resources specific to their rural community that facilitate and inhibit a successful transition to adulthood.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter explores the methods that were used for this study and the rationale. The majors sections of this chapter include: (a) research design; (b) setting and sampling strategy; (c) data collection methods; (d) data analysis; and (e) limitations. The aim of this study was to better understand how young women in a rural community define successful adulthood and how life in a rural area benefited or challenged their transition into successful adulthood. The following issues were examined:

- What are the attributes participants perceive to be indicators of successful adulthood?

- How do the perceived available and accessible resources in their community affect their perceptions of successful adulthood?

Research Design

This study uses a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyze the data and link concepts together. This form of qualitative research was chosen with the intent of developing a theory that enhances the understanding of the perceptions of rural girls regarding what characterizes a successful adult and what influences those perceptions. The potential participants were identified and offered an opportunity to participate. Due to the small size and interconnectedness of the rural community, data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This approach, rather than focus groups, provided a confidential environment for participants to share their

perceptions and experiences. Data were collected until data saturation occurred (Fossey,

Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Setting and Sampling Strategy

This study used non-probability, purposive sampling to choose a site for

research. Participants were recruited through a rural school in the community of

Preston, located in central Texas. Preston lacked racial diversity, with a majority of

"white" residents, which was reflected in the study participants. Over 200 students

attended Pre-Kindergarten-12th grade in Preston, with a student-teacher ratio or less than

10:1. Approximately 25% of students in the school were enrolled in the free or reduced

lunch programs.

The site was determined through use of the NCES classification system.

Through using the NCES website, a remote rural school was selected for the study. In

the NCES system, a remote rural area is defined as a "rural territory that is more than 25

miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster"

(Provasnik et al., 2007, p. 2). Rural schools considered as study sites were public

institutions in a remote rural area. There were 210 remote rural school identified in the

state of Texas, with 72 schools the served students in Pre-Kindergarten-12th grade.

Based on geographic proximity to College Station, Texas, eight schools were contacted

and invited to participate in the study. Two school administrators declined having their

schools participate following two emails introducing the study. One of those two

administrators did not give a reason for declining; the other administrator cited a lack of

interest from parents and students. Two site administrators were unresponsive to email

and phone contact. After engaging with the remaining site administrators (through

approximately two phone calls and four emails per site on average), one administrators

became unresponsive, another declined participation due to the inability to find a faculty

member to act as liaison, and two site administrators conveyed their interest in

participating in the study. Both sites were considered. Preston was chosen as the study

site because of its school's enthusiastic and engaged administrator and liaison; this

allowed the research process to move along faster and to have more site support. An in-

person meeting was arranged with the liaison, a specialized teacher in the school, to help

the liaison better understand the research process and goals of the study. Following the

in-person meeting, communication occurred primarily through email and text messaging

with the liaison to arrange interviews with the participants and handle other issues as

needed. Approximately 26 students were selected and invited to participate. Potential

participants possessed the following qualifications:

(1.) All participants self-identified as girls.

(2.) All participants were adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 as of June 1,

2013.

(3.) All participants lived in a rural community.

(4.) All participants attended a rural high school.

(5.) All participants, as of June 1, 2013, had completed their freshman year of

high school, but not yet spent a complete semester as a high school graduate.

(6.) All participants had lived in the rural area for 2 or more years.

Sampling continued until data saturation occurred. The final number of participants was 10.

Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected based on a grounded theory research approach. Once consent and assent was obtained from parents and students, data were collected through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Data were collected during the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014. Collection of data continued until data saturation occurred.

Participant Selection

Potential participants who met the criteria for inclusion were contacted with information about the opportunity to participate in the research study. Parents of 26 adolescents within the sampling frame were contacted by letters sent home with students from school in the fall semester of the school year. Letters were sent home only once and were written in English. In the letter, parents or guardians who were interested in allowing their child to participate were instructed on how to proceed so that their adolescent was able to participate. Students who fit within the sampling frame were then asked if they were willing to consider participating.

After potential participants and guardians were initially contacted, potential participants were informed of the confidentiality of shared material and their right to request shared information not be used in the reports. Ten participants were then

selected from the potential participants who gave their assent and were able to obtain their parent's or guardian's consent. Selected participants were given the opportunity to opt out of participation at any point within the research process. Participants included students in 10th, 11th, and 12th grade and included both athletes and non-athletes. Seven of the ten participants came from families with divorced parents. The majority of the students had not lived in Preston their entire lives, but had moved to Preston during the time they attended school. In addition, most participants had extended family that lived in Preston or in nearby communities. For participating in the study, each participant received a $30 visa gift card.

Protocol Development

Previous research and theory were used to frame initial interview questions. The questions used as a basis for the development of interview questions were adapted from questions used in Ley et al. (1996), which were adapted from another instrument which was intended to explore "details about parents' educational backgrounds, economic status, and type of employment" (Ley et al., 1996, p. 134). Ley et al.'s study focus was similar to this study in focusing on the plans and thoughts youth have for the future and considering to some degree how the community impacts youth's aspirations. However, Ley et al.'s study was quantitatively based, limiting the richness of the data collected and not allowing for further exploration and explanation of answers to the questions on the instrument. This study further explored how the interaction of community and youth

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influenced youth's aspirations and ideas of successful adulthood. The questions from Ley et al. were adjusted to elicit more detailed, qualitative responses.

Interviews

Interviews allowed questions to be asked that helped increase understanding of the context of the youth and the meanings attributed to certain words, concepts, or experiences by the youth being interviewed. At the beginning of every interview, the interviewer reminded the participant of her opportunity to decline participation in the research project. If the participant chose to continue, the interview was initially based on a list of open-ended, exploratory questions concerning the perception of the participant on what characterizes successful adulthood and what has impacted her perceptions. Follow-up questions during the interview were allowed more detail and specific ideas to be explored. After each interview, the interviewer considered if the order or phrasing of questions needed to be changed to improve future interviews. Flexibility concerning the order of questions asked was encouraged to facilitate a conversational tone within the interviews.

Interviews were conducted beginning in October 2013. The specific times and days of the interviews depended on the availability of participants, which was determined through email, phone conversations, or brief in-person meetings with a school liaison. The location of interviews varied to accommodate typical school activities. Sites were chosen with consideration given to participant preference and comfort. Efforts were taken to ensure the privacy of the conversation during the

interview. All interviews were conducted in English. Interviews lasted between 50-170

(Approximate Mean: 90 minutes) minutes, varying depending on the level of

engagement by participant and their willingness to continue the discussion. The

interviews were digitally recorded with the participant's consent. Detailed notes were

taken to document body language and provide information in the event of a recording

error. Each of the interviews was transcribed.

Data Analysis

A constant comparative method of analysis – "taking information from data

collection and comparing it to emerging categories" (Creswell, 2012, p. 86) - was used

to facilitate the formation of emergent categories. In between interview sessions, the

recorded interviews were reviewed and memos were made of emerging themes within

data and interesting concepts or phrasing used by participants (Marshall & Rossman,

2010). Memos were also made throughout transcription and coding. These memos,

used with the literature review and other collected data, assisted in further data analysis

(Marshall & Rossman, 2010) and helped the analyst "move from working with data to

conceptualizing" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 218).

After completing the interviews, the data were transcribed and read through at least once. The first two interviews were coded on paper and in NVIVO and codes were compared; both methods identified codes fairly evenly. NVIVO was selected as the tool for coding future interviews because it best assisted in keeping the codes organized. After each of the following interviews, the data were uploaded to NVIVO directly after transcription.

Due to the constant comparative nature of the study, coding was not a linear process. However, Figure 1 shows a simplified example of the relationships between codes and the formation of a category. Data were open coded concept by concept using NVIVO; concepts, their properties, and their dimensions were identified through this process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After the data had undergone open coding, axial coding was conducted to relate categories to the appropriate subcategories while continuing to develop their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
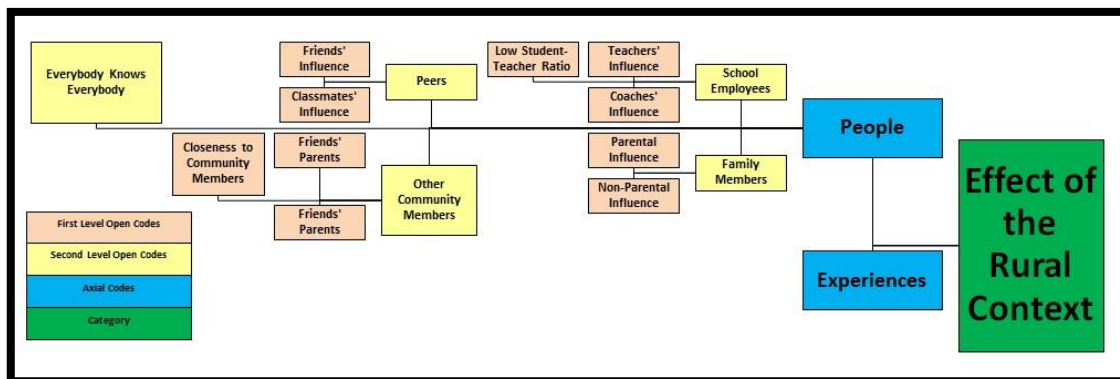

Figure 1: How Codes Lead To a Category

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This was followed by selective coding on the data, which helped to begin integrating and refining a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Throughout data collection, analysis progressed; new codes were constantly compared to existing codes and emerging categories.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the coding, six other researchers also coded parts of the data to help sharpen the analytical process. After the primary researcher coded the first six transcribed interviews, excerpts of data (4-6 pages each) that were heavily coded and included a variety of codes were selected. Un-coded versions of those excerpts were sent to six of the researcher's colleagues who had experience coding and working with qualitative data; they open coded the excerpts and provided properties and dimensions of potential categories. Their open codes and potential categories and the researcher's codes and categories were compared and found to be similar; no significant differences were found. As analysis progressed, the researcher continued to compare the codes and potential categories of colleagues to the categories emerging in the study.

Human Subjects Guidelines

Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University to protect the rights and confidentiality of the participants. Research ethics were carefully observed and participants were informed of the purpose of the study, data collection methods, any possible risks, and were assured of

their right to voluntarily withdraw at any time during the study process. Due to the age

of the majority of the participants, parent consent as well as youth assent was obtained.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Youth's perceptions of what characterized successful adulthood varied. Participants commonly mentioned that achievement of success depended on having money, a job, further education, and specific relationships. Ultimately, though, the goal of success was to be happy. Money, a job, further education, and relationships were tools which were to be used in a way that facilitated youth's happiness. Additionally, participants discussed the rural community context and its effect on their perceptions of what characterizes successful adulthood. Youth frequently mentioned the social, educational, and occupational resources and barriers in their rural community and how those affected their current abilities and future plans.

Perceptions of Success

The participants were asked to explain their perceptions and definitions of success. When discussing the definition of success, participants discussed two main aspects: achievement and variations of success. Though success was related to achievement, the youth strongly conveyed there were variations of success in adulthood due to differentiations among adults' goals. Participants discussed achievement of success in terms of achieving versus not achieving goals. They conveyed that the achievement of goals is what creates success as an adult. As McCalley said, "you succeed at your life if you accomplish your goals." Though achieving goals was the common definition of success, variations of success were frequently mentioned. Shelbi

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shared, "I think [success] means a lot of different things." McCalley explained that "[Other people] can be succeeding in a totally opposite way from how I'm going to succeed." These variations of success were often described as depending upon what an individual wants. As Jasmine shared, "Success is, like, to reach your goals in life, to get what you wanted out of life." Because the youth perceived that different people want different things out of life, they communicated that success would not look the same for everyone. The youth conveyed that, since not everyone has the same goals, success will naturally look a bit different for each person. However, the youth did have similar goals that they desired to achieve to be successful.

Achieving Success as an Adult

The participants were asked about their perceptions of what characterizes a successful adult and what goals they planned to pursue to reach success. Because success was defined as the achievement of goals, the participants' specific goals for adulthood provided insight into what they believed were important indicators of successful adulthood. The most evident indicators of success were money, further education, a job, and relationships. The core category, happiness, streams through all of the indicators and is itself an indicator of success. These indicators are interrelated, but are addressed separately.

Money

Participants often discussed money and its impact on success, although some respondents shared that money was not needed for success. Some participants suggested having just enough money to accomplish certain things (e.g. paying bills, taking family on vacations, providing for children, helping others) was needed for success, while others seemed to think a higher amount of money was likely to lead to increased happiness and success.

McCalley stated, "to succeed, money is just not really needed but is an option. Money is always helpful. Maybe it's not really needed and if we didn't have so much money, we would learn to succeed with what we have. Not, if I had this much money I could get this. If we looked at what's right in front of us, we would be able to see so much more than just the money." Other participants, however, believed that money was important to some degree. As Paige shared, "money does make you happy because money is very important. So, if you make a lot of money, obviously you're going to be happy."

Most participants, however, simply wanted to make "enough" money to achieve a comfortable lifestyle. Tiffany shared that she wanted "Just enough [money] to where I could pay my bills and have food in the house and money in my pocket." To Brenda, having a "good life" was her goal, which she explained meant, "I'm not saying that I want to be rich and get a lot of money, but I just want to have a good life for me and for, like, my family… Like, I don't mean, like, having, like, all the money in the world, like, the goodest cars, but just having enough [money] to, like, live and, like, I guess, take my

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family, like, on vacations and stuff. I guess that would be good enough instead of, like, having all the money in the world." Kristina shared her desire for enough. She stated, "if you can take care of yourself as an adult, your bills are paid up, if your family is taken care of, you don't necessarily have to be well-off or rich. You just need to be able to take care of yourself. Pay your bills and keep food on the table, even if it's not steak and lobster every night."

<p style="text-align:center">Job</p>

All participants mentioned the need to have a job. Some simply said a job was needed and it did not matter what the quality of the job was. For example, Shelbi shared, "having a job is something that you just do… no matter what it is... you have to have a job." Ginger explained, "as long as you get a job, it doesn't matter. It could be a poor job, it could be a good job. It doesn't matter. Just get a job." Though simply getting a job was all that was needed according to a minority of participants, most participants specified that a successful adult needed to have a good job. A good job, they explained, was a job which brought in enough money to accomplish certain tasks and was also a job you liked.

A Good-Paying Job

Money was frequently discussed when various participants mentioned jobs they were considering. Conveying that "a good-paying job" (Tiffany) was needed for success was common among participants. This helped adults achieve financial independence

from their families. The concept of independence through having a good-paying job was important because, as Anya stated, successful adults were expected to have a job and be "making money and supporting themselves."

Participants discussed the need to have a job if an adult is going to accomplish his or her goals and be successful. Jobs were important because they brought in money, and at least enough money to live off of was needed to achieve success. As Shelbi said, money matters because "You have to buy a car... it's like, even food to eat - you have to have money to buy food. Nothing is free… you have to have a job and nothing is free. You have to have income to have the basics in life… It's like it all kind of ties together. You have to have money to buy this. You have to have a job to get money." As Jasmine shared, to be successful as an adult, a person needs "To have a good paying job." She further explained that a good paying job is important "To have money… Because you're going to need money, like, if you're going to live on your own you'd have to pay for everything…" A job affected more than just a person's income, though. A person's desires in life and how much money those desires required to be achieved affected the kind of job the youth felt an adult needed. As Shelbi shared, **"I think the type of job you have creates the lifestyle you live."** The idea of a lifestyle ties into the bigger picture emphasis on happiness and enjoying all of life, including the work you do.

Liking a Job

As important as money and working were, money did not make a person like his or her job. McCalley shared that, even though she knew "there may not be a lot of

money in it," she still wanted to do the job that she felt she would enjoy. Anya shared,

"if you love what you're doing, I guess money shouldn't matter because you're doing

something you love." Liking your job was a separate idea from money, although

connected at times. A good job could be identified when "you like what you're doing.

You are passionate about it. It's what you love to do. It's not something you hate doing

[but do] just so you can make money" (Anya). Nine of the ten participants explained

that it was important to do a job you liked, something you want to do, or something that

fits you. Brenda shared, "A good job would probably be, like, the career that you want,

not just, like, a job. Because I always hear teachers saying that, if you do what you love,

it will never be a job, or you've never worked a day in your life, or something like that.

So, I think that will be a good job. It would be, like, whenever you do what you want or

what you love to do." Doing what you want or what you are passionate about was

emphasized often. In discussing what job each participant was considering doing, nine

of the ten participants spoke of how their interests aligned with potential jobs they

considered. They conveyed this with an understated emphasis, as if it was exceedingly

obvious that interests should direct you to a job rather than that need of income or

money would direct you to a job. Each young woman made her plan for what jobs to

consider doing based on things she was currently interested in and often what she

currently had some experience in.

Further Education

All participants in the study mentioned that they planned to attend college. As Shelbi shared, "I have grown up in the type of lifestyle that college... It's just what you do… you have to have a college degree." All participants assumed that they would graduate college with a degree and/or appropriate certification. Some participants had their sights set on large, 4-year universities, but most planned to transfer in after attending a junior college for a year or two. Haley explained she wanted to go to a nearby junior college first because "I mean, it's closer to here… Kind of like easing into more than just, like, jumping into it." Participants also mentioned that college would provide them new experiences to learn and develop. Anya shared that she wanted to "Feel the environment of college and how they see life as in college and the real world." Shelbi stated "…going to college will kind of give you insight… it makes you look deeper into… what you really want to do."

Help Getting a Good Job

Participants noted how a lack of further education limited job opportunities. A common theme for the majority of participants was that attending college would facilitate them being able to get a job or a better paying job later on in life. Haley said, "it depends on your job, like, a lot of jobs require that - a college degree. Especially if you're looking for a good job. I mean, one that pays good, you know? Most of them require college degrees." Kristina stated, "If I didn't go to college, I would probably regret it in the long run." Her regrets were connected to the idea that attending college –

or the lack of attending college – affected job opportunities. Some young women saw college as a tool to help people have the ability to return and make a living in the rural community. Shelbi shared, "I think without college, it's very hard to find a very, very nice job in this area. So I think you have to have a college degree and stuff like that. …I think that if you don't go to college and you're just here right after high school, that is something that's very limited in a place like this."

Pursue Interests

Others explained that attending college was a way to pursue things they were interested in or passionate about. For example, one young woman shared how she was not sure what to go to school for until she toured a university campus and found out there was a field of study that aligned with her interests. Kristina shared, "I wanted to find something to go to school for. It's just I couldn't find my passion or anything like that… we went [to the campus]… and we talked about [a field of study] and like what I could do, like, after I graduate with a job… there's so many possibilities that I just fell in love with it… after I went there, it just made sense. So, it all clicked." Many of the youth similarly conveyed the importance of pursuing their interests if they were to be successful.

Relationships

All of the participants mentioned their desire to be married and have children. The reasons for these desires had a similar theme: the desire for happiness. As Tiffany

explained, "…after I graduate from college, [I want to] find a husband and get married and have kids and live happily ever after."

Significant Other

All of the participants mentioned that they expected to engage in a relationship with a significant other. Most participants who addressed timing of marriage said there was not a specific time they planned to get married. Most often, the participants communicated they planned to wait until they had completed their further education pursuits and then get married. Each of the young women expected they would get married and hoped to stay married. For most, it was a prominent goal that would help them achieve success. Participants' reasons for getting married varied. However, the main goal in a relationship was to be happy. As Shelbi shared, "You're really with them because you're happy. Why not be happy for the rest of your life and… be successful." This pursuit of happiness manifested itself differently for many of the participants. Some sought support, some wanted to be loved, and some craved the experience of sharing goals and life direction with a spouse. Others saw marriage as an avenue to having children, which was also seen as important for them to be successful.

All of the participants planned to get and stay married, but three participants mentioned that a spouse was not needed for success. As Kristina shared, "if you're good on your own, then that's what success is." She explained, "I think that [marriage is], like, a bonus. If you find that you're going to live with for the rest of your life and have kids, that's great for you. But I don't think it's, 'You have to do this, you have to be

married to be successful.'" Adults were considered successful as long as the relationships they had – or did not have, if they were "good on [their] own" – made them happy.

Staying married was part of the goals of the participants, but divorce did not eliminate the opportunity for success. Divorce was seen as acceptable as long as it made you happy. As Shelbi shared, "Just because you're divorced does not mean that you're not successful." She explained, "My mom tells me this all the time and clearly they got a divorce because they weren't really happy. Mom tells me just do what makes you happy. …just being happy, yes, is definitely a huge part of life… why would you want to wake up every day not happy?"

Children

Each participant mentioned that she hoped to have children someday. Getting married and having kids was tied into the youth's views of success. Again, the reasons for having children varied. Happiness was central to the desire for children. Some youth wanted to have children simply because the desired to – they felt it would make them happy to get what they want. Some conveyed they wanted to love and be loved by someone and to be needed. Some participants even noted that having children was a way to continue being involved in organizations they loved.

Some youth gave a specific age by which they expected to have children. Other participants took a very relaxed approach – Kristina shared, "Yeah, I want kids. I don't know [when], I'm just going to go with the flow." Though children were desired by all

participants, the majority of participants expected they would not have children until

after they finished school and were married. Multiple participants mentioned wanting to

wait to have children until they had time to do other things. For example, Haley shared

that she wanted to "do stuff I want to do, get my life on track, and then… start a family"

and Brenda said, "when I get married, I don't want to have kids, like, right away"

because she wanted time to focus on other things.

<div align="center">*Core Category: Happiness*</div>

All of the participants expressed that a strong indicator of success is the idea of

happiness. Because different things made different people happy or fulfilled their

differing desires or wants, success looked different for different people. However, the

idea that you should be happy with whatever you are doing at the moment and you

should strive for an overall eventual happiness was present in each of the participants'

dialogues. As the participants shared, "[being] successful is being in a place where

you're happy" (Paige) and "When you are happy with what you have done, I think then

you're successful" (Kristina). Additionally, the concept of striving for happiness

through fulfilling desires and taking the steps needed to fulfill those desires was

prevalent in all of the categories regarding indicators of success, saturating the data with

this concept that happiness leads to success. As Haley shared, "[success is] pretty much

meeting your goals, being happy." The ideas of having enough money to be happy,

studying what you want to study and letting your interests direct you, having a job you

like, and engaging in relationships which make you happy all help demonstrate the

<div align="center">58</div>

significance of this concept of happiness to the participants' perceptions of success. As Shelbi shared, "you have to have happiness to do what you like and be successful."

Rural Community Context

Some influences on youth's perceptions of success were not located within the community, but living in the rural community was mentioned often as an influential factor. Participants mentioned that access and barriers to social resources and educational and occupational resources influenced the development of their goals and how their perceptions of success developed.

Social Resources and Barriers

All ten participants mentioned some sort of community connection as a resource and nine of the ten participants mentioned some version of the phrase "everybody knows everybody." Youth's social context – especially their interactions with peers and the larger community - impacted how their perceptions of success developed. Additionally, family members (non-parental family members and parents) and school staff (teachers and coaches) also influenced youth's perceptions of success by providing life direction and acting as role models.

Closeness with Peers

Participants explained that the small class sizes in their rural school helped facilitate the development of relationships with others in the school. Closeness to peers

was commonly mentioned by participants. Speaking of her classmates, Kristina shared "we're all close… we can all go to each other for anything." Participants often referenced their classmates as "family." As Jasmine explained, "everybody here has grown up together… you're really all just one big family." There was little distinction mentioned in relationships with peers – students of all grade levels were friends with one another. Haley explained, "the people that you're close with are the people that you- I mean, you go to school with them and, like, you constantly see them, like, all the time. It doesn't matter what grade you're in. You just constantly see them." The relationships were beneficial because they allowed social engagement during and outside of school. The social context of peer interaction was also helpful because, "[your friends] know who you are and what you can be" (Haley), which allowed them to push participants to do well in a variety of activities. Participants explained that peers provided support, information on relationships and possible jobs, and general life direction, all of which were intertwined with the youth's developing perceptions of success.

Closeness with Larger Community

Participants' perceptions of their closeness with peers provided some evidence of how everybody knowing everybody works between youth. The idea of everybody knowing everybody was just as prevalent when discussing youth-adult relationships in the larger community, though. The ideas of closeness to the larger community and the feeling the community was a big family who would help if needed was frequently mentioned. When asked about the benefits of living in her rural community, Paige

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noted the benefits of, "Being close with everybody. Knowing that everybody's there for you. Knowing that you can call somebody and they'll be there like that." Kristina explained, "I mean, even the town… is close… I mean, a lot of people in town are really kind. If you need help, they'll help you out, give you a favor, you return the favor... It's just very, like, very comforting and it's like a giant family that just talks about everyone behind their back… it's very close-knit, it's very family oriented. So if I'm in trouble, I can call anyone basically."

Participants often noted issues resulting from everybody knowing everybody in addition to mentioning the benefits of feeling close to community members. Jasmine explained that, in the community, "Everybody knows everybody, which is good and bad." Participants shared that everybody knowing everybody often led to a spread of information and gossip. Most frequently, it was simple information about what a person was doing or who they were dating. There were multiple stories of extremes, however, which the participants shared. For example, one participant found out from a friend that the participant's parents were getting a divorce; her friend had read it in the community newspaper. Another young woman explained that her parent found out she had engaged in sexual activity for the first time due to the closeness of community members. As Jasmine explained, "…anything I do, [my parent will] find out about."

The benefits of being close to community members outweighed the frustrations, however. Participants often mentioned that being connected to community members helped them move toward being able to achieve their perceptions of success. Community members often provided assistance to rural youth as they developed their

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perceptions of success. For example, participants shared that once a youth conveyed an interest in learning about an eventual occupation, the information would spread around and community members who knew someone in the field would often be willing to help the youth make useful contacts. Kristina shared, "…they ask you, 'Oh, what do you want to do?' And so, you get on that conversation. They're like, 'Oh, you know what, I'm going to give you the number of this person…' So, that helps sometimes…" Anya explained that community members were helpful "'cause you know everybody and you kind of know what they do and I guess just knowing them lets you know how they got there and they can explain to you and teach you on how they got there and knowing what they did."

Many participants also mentioned the importance of support and encouragement from others. Haley explained that, even though there were limited opportunities in the rural community, being close to community members was helpful. She shared, "I do have, like, a lot of people that push me because, like I said, you know everybody, so everybody knows what, like- what you're doing and everybody- I guess, a lot of people know more about you." Kristina explained, "since they're so close, they'll hear [my future plans.] And they'll be like, 'Oh, that's a great thing, good for her.' And just it's all like very encouraging most of the time." In addition to receiving encouragement from being so close to the community, youth also internalized other messages from community members that propelled them to be successful through leaving the community. As Kristina shared, "a lot of people tell me in the town and at school,

'You're too smart to stay here… You need to work hard because you can get out of here. You're going to do something.'"

Family Members

  All ten of the participants mentioned that family members – both parents and non-parental family members - influenced their perceptions of success. It is important to note that family members who were influences did not necessarily live in the rural community with the young women; often, these influences had lived in more urbanized areas at some point in their lives, which may have facilitated the sharing of information about life outside of the rural community. Additionally, seven of the ten participants noted that teachers or coaches impacted their perceptions and life direction. These relationships often developed with a basis in school, but extended into non-academic interaction, through athletic programs or through working together in other settings.

  Nine participants specifically mentioned their parents' impact on their perceptions of success. Youth shared that parents were strong influences in the youth's life and direction. Paige explained that her parents influenced her thoughts on success "because, you know, I look up to them to see what they [think] is successful… Because that's like who you look up to. That's who you've lived with your whole life. That's like the only thing you've known to look up to. That's your role models." Brenda shared, "[my parents] have always been, like, an inspiration to me because, like, every day they try hard and stuff, and I want to do that, like I want to be like them, like, I want to make them proud, I guess, and, like, I want to try hard every day, for them more than for me."

Parents' influence on the participants strongly influenced youth's belief that further education was important. Jasmine shared, "my parents are going to make me go to college… my parents want me to get an education because both of them didn't go to college. So they know well now, with the economy, you have to have a degree in something to get a job anywhere."

Some participants saw their parents as role models and felt their parents' influence was positive. Other participants, though, voiced the desire to avoid being like their parents. Some mentioned wanting to avoid the work schedule and lack of job opportunities that a lack of education caused their parents. At times, the desire to avoid imitating a parent went much deeper than a work schedule, though. For example, McCalley shared, "I don't want to be like my mom. I tell my granny all the time, I don't want to turn out like my mom…You hear people, they say the daughters are like their mothers and sons are like their fathers. And I don't want to be like that, I just want to start all over with me, start over and let my kids see how I think a family should be, not like how my mom did... I don't want to be like my mom."

Important non-parental family members included grandparents, aunts, and cousins. Most commonly, family members were seen as good examples to follow or role models. As McCalley explained, "[my family member is] so helpful, I've always looked up to her. She's always been the one I looked up [to]. …I want to follow in her footsteps, she's the role model I want to follow. Because, I look like her, everyone tells me I look like her so that's just one thing that gets me. She has such a strong family. …they're just so close to each other. …I want that! I want to have a strong family. Just

seeing her happy makes me want to be like her, to have a family like hers, I want to be a teacher like her and I just want to do everything like her. In my eyes, she has the perfect life." Family members also provided life direction regarding what to pursue and what to avoid. Shelbi shared, "I really think it is your family that pushes you because they're obviously the ones that raised you. They teach you right from wrong and their opinions kind of make who you are. And so, I think that's the people that push me - the most definitely is my grandparents and my parents."

Participants mentioned that, while some family members were role models, there were some family members they hoped to avoid imitating. Some students just wanted to do a different type of job than their family members. Some participants explained that they wanted to avoid being abusive or getting divorced like their family members. Others wanted to be able to have a better life and have more opportunities. Tiffany shared, "I don't want to always be stuck here… I want to be able to live better and go to college like some of my family didn't… I want to go to college because I've never really seen any of my older brother or sisters go to college."

School Staff Members

Teachers and coaches were influences on the majority of participant's perceptions. Coaches and teachers often provided life direction to the participants. Sometimes this came through identifying a students' potential. As Haley explained, "Pretty much, like, the teachers and coaches that you've been with for a few years that just see your personality and see, like, who you are… they know what you can be."

Other participants spoke of the relationships that developed between themselves and their teachers or coaches. Athletes often mentioned coaches' influences as a result of coach-athlete relationship. The young women also mentioned teachers who built relationships with them and directed their interests. Kristina shared, "my [former] teacher… was a really great mentor for me and always would help me out when I needed stuff… I just respected her. She was just—I thought she was a really great teacher… So we're kind of friends. It's kind of weird because she used to be my teacher. But it—I mean, we're friends."

Educational and Occupational Resources and Barriers

A lack of educational and occupational resources in the rural community affected participants' perceptions of success. Each youth conveyed that they felt the need to leave the community to be successful and get an education. Almost all expected their job would lead them to leaving the community as well, even though many of the participants wanted to move back and raise their future children in the rural community.

Educational Resources

The expectation that college was part of the participants' future plan was communicated consistently in the interviews. Shelbi shared, "I have grown up in the type of lifestyle that college... It's just what you do." That seemed to be the assumption – they had no other choice, or at least no other real choice. None of the girls really saw staying in town and not getting a college degree as a viable option. Many of them spoke

of the limits living in the rural community placed on further education and job

opportunities. As Brenda shared, living in the rural community affected her ability to

reach her goals "because it's, like, a lot smaller and there's really nowhere to, like, go.

Like, if you want, like, to go to college, you have to go to, like, a bigger town." They

were quick to point out, however, that if someone tried hard enough and was determined,

that person could likely get access to the resources they needed or wanted. College was

a way to battle the limitations of growing up in a rural community. Tiffany shared, "I

don't want to always be stuck here and I want to be able to live better and go to college

like some of my family didn't."

It was often stated that the participants assumed a person would obviously need

to leave the rural community to access educational resources, however. The youth

explained how even basic educational resources were not easily accessible in the rural

community. As Paige shared, "everything you need isn't right here in Preston… I'd

have to go over there, work my way over there to find what I needed. Just like college, I

have to move away because I don't live in range of that college. …everything you need

is probably there, like the library, the this, the that, everything. Here, there ain't

nothing." Participants shared that the closest college was a junior college almost an hour

away. Additionally, aside from using the internet, participants struggled to find

information about colleges and careers. The internet itself, though mentioned

consistently as a resource, was a resource with limited access for some participants who

were only able to access it during two class periods at school. Participants explained

that they anticipated having access to more resources when they were in college since

they would be outside of the community. Resources, such as access to universities, libraries, the internet, and other educational tools, would help them in their pursuit of success.

Occupational Resources

Participants often mentioned the need for educational resources to assist them in learning about and experiencing various careers that would help them transition into a job. This was necessary, they communicated, because of the lack of occupational resources within the rural community. For example, Jasmine shared, "once you graduate, you have to find something full time and there are only like restaurants around here and you don't want to be a waitress all your life." Haley explained, "you feel like you want more of a chance… because, here, you're limited."

The idea of being limited was repeatedly mentioned by participants when discussing how the rural community affected their pursuit of success and development of their plans. A lack of occupational resources was frequently mentioned as limiting the participants' goals. The youth communicated that they recognized they had to use all the resources available. Kristina shared, "I think [living in the rural community has] made me realize I have to use everything that I have. In the city, you could take so many things for granted just because it's right there, but, here, you have to focus more and you have to try harder to find what you need to reach your goals… you have to utilize them as much as you can."
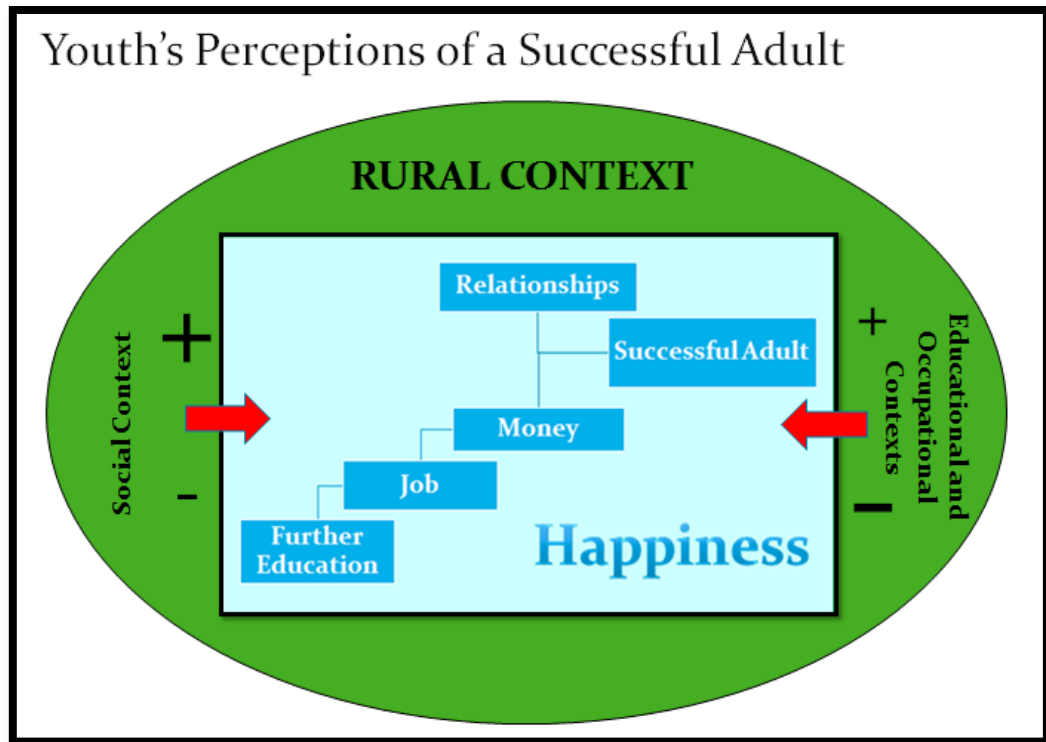
Figure 2: Youth's Perceptions of a Successful Adult

Summary of Youth's Perceptions of a Successful Adult

As shown in Figure 2, youth perceived that specific relationships and money were needed to achieve success as an adult. They explained that the process to obtain money, however, was dependent upon the process of getting further education and getting a job. Throughout their pursuit of success, youth perceived that each step and outcome of the process to achieving success should be saturated in happiness. They conveyed that a successful person would pursue their interests and be happy with what they studied in further education, have a job they liked and were happy doing, would have enough money to live a lifestyle that made them happy, and engage in relationships

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that made them happy. Social, educational, and occupational aspects of the rural context influenced participants' development of these perceptions of successful adulthood. The participants most commonly emphasized the positive aspects of the rural social context, while noting primarily negative aspects of the rural educational and occupational contexts, in terms of how they framed both their conceptualization of success as well as their pathways to achieving success.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Perceptions of Success

An important goal of youth development practice has been to assist youth in becoming "fully functional adults" (Pittman et al., 2003). Because youth are important stakeholders to consider in youth development efforts (Brademas & Weber, 1999; Brennan et al., 2007; Campbell & Edwards, 2012; Seidl et al., 1999), it was important to explore youth's perceptions regarding success in adulthood. Youth defined success as the achievement of goals, but noted that goals would vary from person to person, which supports other research that shows aspirations vary among youth (Bajema, Miller, & Williams, 2002). Some goals were similar among the ten participants in this study, however, including the need to have money, get further education, have a good job, and engage in relationships with a husband and children. Intertwined throughout these indicators and considered as an indicator itself is the core category of happiness.

The pursuit of happiness and the desire for money, further education, a good job, and family relationships are similar to other youth in the United States. This may have interesting implications for programs. Although programming dealing with agriculture and a rural lifestyle are important and valuable for both rural and urban students, perhaps programming centered on urban life, skills, and issues is also just as important to both rural and urban youth. If rural communities are going to continue needing to send youth outside of the community to pursue educational and occupational opportunities, these communities may want to begin focusing on programming for those students which will

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help them be successful in their transition from rural to urban life and in a potentially urban-centered workforce. However, rural communities should consider that consistently encouraging their youth - especially the best and brightest - to leave without providing means for them to return and be successful may only continue to further issues brought on by the rural youth exodus (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Members of rural communities should rethink the message they are sending their youth. Repeatedly conveying, "'You're too smart to stay here… You need to work hard because you can get out of here'" (Kristina), tells youth that to be successful is to leave. More discourse about returning in the future and increased efforts to provide opportunities for returners to be successful in the rural community may help rural communities flourish instead of committing "rural suicide" (Carr & Kefalas, 2009, p. 139).

The Effect of the Rural Context

The results of this study provide evidence that rural youth are impacted by the rural community in which they live. Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model (1994) conveys that the rural context is made up of smaller subsystems. Its subsystems influence rural youth's development, including youth's perceptions of what characterizes success in adulthood and their plans to pursue achieving success. Data collected in this study suggests that youth's perceptions and plans regarding success in adulthood are influenced by their experiences and the people they encounter. Attending a small school and living in a small town influenced youth's thoughts on success, as did family members, school employees, peers, and other community members.

Youth noted multiple benefits of attending a small school. It provided them with activities and experiences they may not have been able to engage in if they attended a larger, urban-centered school (being a teacher's aide, playing multiple sports, etc.). The small class sizes provided peer groups that became "like family" to them and relationships were able to develop between youth in different grades. Peers are often discussed as influences in research. However, in this study, peers were conveyed to be significantly less influential than family members (including both parental and non-parental family members). Instead, peers were more helpful in the relay of information about potential jobs and in providing encouragement and support.

In addition to small class sizes, small schools often tend to have a low student-teacher ratio. The impact of school employees, such as teachers or coaches, was extremely prominent in the data collected in this study. Multiple participants conveyed that the ability to engage with teachers or coaches was easier because of the size of the school. Teacher-student and coach-student relationships may be one example of Bronfenbrenner's proximal processes, having "the general effect of reducing or buffering against environmental differences in developmental outcome" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p.38). Facilitating the development of relationships between school employees and students may be strategies that can be intentionally used to influence the perceptions of the youth on successful adulthood and buffer against contextual differences.

For youth in this study, growing up attending a small school was typically considered a positive experience. Issues with attending a small school did come up in

participant's interviews, however. Youth noted a lack of academic opportunities, such as few options in class choices and limited opportunities for pursuing further education early, and limited exposure to different cultures and social groups. Additionally, some youth mentioned the limitations of rarely having the opportunity to pursue artistic pursuits through the school due to a lack of extracurricular options (sports or Ag-based activities were the only extracurricular options noted).

Family members were also strong influences on youth's perceptions of adulthood. Family members were often seen as role models, though some were seen as people to avoid patterning one's life after. Interestingly, many of the participants in the study had parents who were divorced. This may have contributed to the relevance of non-parental family members' impact on youth's perceptions of success. Non-parental family members, primarily grandmothers, were conveyed as a surrogate parent and role model for youth whose parents were divorced.

Community members in the larger community were influential in the lives of youth and in the development of their plans to achieve success. The youth in the study repeatedly shared that, in their small town, "everybody knows everybody." Prior research has suggested that rural communities have high levels of social capital (Crockett et al., 2000). Social capital encompasses the relationships in the rural context that act as an accessible network of resources that can facilitate youth's pursuit of success (Crockett et al., 2000; Furstenberg, 1997; Putnam, 2000).   The participants perceived their many ties to the rural community (i.e. everybody knowing everybody) could help them accomplish nearly anything. Community members were perceived as

enabling and empowering youth by their willingness to act as a resource or provide access to other potential resources. Youth perceived their rural community as able to provide resources and direction in a way that communities in urban areas were considered less likely to be able to provide. They provided contacts which would help youth pursue higher education and get a good job. Community members also provided support and encouragement to the youth after hearing of participant's plans to leave the community to take steps toward achieving success. Youth conveyed that they felt connected to the community. This reflects past research which suggests social capital is a strongly identified resource in rural communities (Crockett et al., 2000).

While some participants conveyed the rural community's diversity, youth most often noted the homogeneity of the rural community. Crockett et al. (2000) writes, "the homogeneity of rural communities may limit adolescents' perceptions of educational and occupational opportunities and constrain the range of acceptable identities" (p.49). The lack of diverse opportunities and experiences available to rural youth did affect youth's perceptions of success and aspirations for the future. These constraints on acceptable identities were evident in various ways. The larger community emphasized education and employment over continuing community connections. Prominent in the data was the idea that a person would be limited or stuck if she stayed in the community. This idea seemed to be engrained in the community. It is interesting that a community which strongly believes in the value of a rural way of life and has communicated that value to its youth also has communicated that staying in the community is basically failure.

Aspirations and Resources

Furstenberg (1999) suggests that youth change their aspirations to adapt to their context, such as the perceived availability or lack or resources. The results of this study provide some interesting methods of aspirations and perceptions of success adjusting to fit life in the rural context. Many students spoke of their desire to remain close to family, but recognized they needed to leave to get further education to prepare them for their jobs. Research has shown that many youth feel they have no choice but to leave (Crockett et al., 2000), which this study supports. Crockett et al. (2000) writes, "What distinguishes rural youth is the need to consider where [their] goals can best be realized: in the community of origin or elsewhere. The limited occupational structure of rural communities and the ongoing economic decline in many rural areas have increased the salience of this issue" (Crockett et al., 2000, p. 63). The results of this study support the idea that rural youth must decide where their goals can best be realized and must actively use the accessible resources to help them in their pursuit of success. Lichter, Roscigno, and Condron (2003) state, "…a high school or college education is less likely to be rewarded with a decent job in America's small towns and rural areas" (p. 101). According to the data collected in this study, the lack of occupational opportunities and economic rewards is a significant part of what causes youth to leave the rural community. The lack of jobs and the lack of reward for higher education and continued professional growth is not rewarded, so it pushes students away. Even though many rural youth want to return to rural areas, previous research has suggested rural youth

"felt that their economic futures were tied to metropolitan areas" (Crockett et al., 2000, p. 65), leading them to have conflicting aspirations for the future.

Youth in this study did convey a sense of limitation caused by a lack of access to resources and opportunities in their rural community. However, this idea that a youth must choose success through exiting the rural community or potentially fail is missing some important aspects conveyed by youth in this study. Many of the youth planned to move back to the rural community after getting an education and possibly some work experience. Each participant hoped to have a family and provide the best for their children, which, for some, included rural life mixed in with some benefits from urban areas. Getting an education that provided an opportunity to have a good job outside of the rural area was, for some, a hoped for resource that would allow their children to live in the rural community. Some youth were deliberately pursuing a job that would bring them back to rural life for their work. Others explained that they planned to find a way to navigate having an urban job and still living in a rural area.

Participants explained that while education was a means to a job and both of those were expected to take the participants away from the community, education also could lead to a job which could allow the participant the option of where to raise a family. Without an education, a person was stuck in the community. Without a good job, the person could not survive well in the community. These seemingly contradictory desires to combine rural and urban benefits may have been considered the result of conflicting aspirations in other research (Hektner, 1995). However, the idea that rural youth who want to work in an urban-centered job and live in a rural area have

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conflicting aspirations may be beginning to be less of a conflict. The influence of various technologies (vehicles, internet, etc.) allows community members to participate in occupations that once would have made it necessary for them to live in an urban environment. Many youth in this study expected they would be able to commute to an urban job and still allow their children to attend a small, rural school and grow up in a rural community. Other research reports similar expectations of the possibility of commuting (Howley et al., 1996).

The potential for increased commuting or access to technology that can increase opportunities in rural communities may cause some lessening of conflicting aspirations among rural youth long term. However, conflicting aspirations were still evident in this study. Many of the youth expressed a desire to remain in the rural community, yet also felt that they must leave the community to get further education and a job if they were to achieve success. Many of the participants mentioned the influence of the rural community on these aspirations. The rural community helped youth value their social ties and the experience of growing up in a rural community (i.e. everybody knowing everybody, opportunities for one on one learning and engagement with teachers and coaches, etc.). At the same time, however, the rural community is influencing these youth in a way that teaches the youth to perceive successful adulthood as being happy and obtaining specific relationships and money through getting further education and a job. This causes conflicting aspirations in rural youth; they desire both to stay in the rural community and to pursue the path to success through leaving the community.

Future Research

More research is needed to fully understand youth's perceptions of success, especially regarding some apparent contradictions; youth's desire to remain in the rural community, yet feeling "stuck" if they do should be further examined. Additionally, the participants conveyed that everyone's path to success was different, yet there were some prevalent similarities among the process to achieve success; the perceived differences and the actualized similarities should be studied more in the future. Also, the importance of certain resources versus others should be explored. Future research regarding possible ways to provide opportunities for rural youth to stay in or return to their rural community and the impact of those opportunities on rural communities should be examined. Additionally, an interesting omission from the majority of the youth's perceptions of success was the goal of health and wellbeing. Youth's perceptions of and reasoning for the importance or lack of importance of health and wellbeing should be examined. Research investigating the effect on success when a person fails to achieve certain goals is also worth further exploration.

Many of the participants in the study had parents who were divorced. This may have contributed to the relevance of non-parental family members' impact on youth's perceptions of success and should be considered in future research. Paying attention to how specific family-dynamics affect youth's perceptions may provide useful insights. Additionally, participants often mentioned they felt there was a town- versus country-living distinction between people within the rural community, which other researchers have also notes as worthy of consideration (Crockett et al., 2000). Other research has

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focused on a farm versus non-farm distinction (Esterman & Hedlund, 1995). However, youth may live in the country and not actually live on a working farm or ranch. This should be further investigated. Future research focusing on a lower-economic population would also be beneficial to see if results of perceptions of success and the perceived effects of context for low-income rural communities are similar. Research regarding the influence of various technologies on youth's perceptions of their ability to achieve success and the impact of technology on rural community connectedness may also provide beneficial insights into rural communities and the experiences of rural youth and adults. In addition, there is an immense need for research on rural boys. Boys face unique issues in their rural communities. They tend to have lower educational and occupational aspirations than urban youth and rural girls (Andres et al., 1999). Research also suggests that rural boys and girls have different expectations placed upon them and have varying experiences and perceptions (Andres et al., 1999; Esterman & Hedlund, 1995). Therefore, future research is needed which specifically examines the challenges, barriers, effects of context, and influences on rural boys, as well as explores their unique perceptions.

Limitations

This study was based on only one site and was focused on a limited number of participants. Increasing the number of sites and participants may bring attention to issues, concepts, and links which this study missed due to its limited size. Additionally, the sample used may not reflect national populations or averages. There are also

limitations in using the NCES definition of remote rural areas. Not only are rural areas

different than urban areas, rural areas vary among themselves. Further, the people

within rural areas and the contexts rural areas exist in and create for youth differ. It is

important to recognize that these participants only provided their viewpoints, which are

not necessarily representative of all rural youth. Though these limitations exist, using

the NCES definition in this study has the potential to bring about an increased

understanding of the ways some rural girls view their world.

Witt (2002) notes the difficulty in validating some research and practitioner

efforts because they cannot be easily quantified. Because this research is qualitatively

based, it is limited to gathering information in a specific manner. However, the data

gained and theory developed could help future researchers develop an understanding of

how better to quantify certain aspects of effective youth development efforts in certain

contexts. Despite these limitations, this study makes significant contributions to the

literature.

Conclusion

Using a grounded theory approach, data were collected through the use of in-

depth interviews from 10 girls in a rural Texas community. The participants defined

success based on achievement, but recognized that the specific process of how success is

achieved varies. Rural youth in this study identified common components of success:

happiness, money, further education, a good job, and healthy relationships. Family

members, school employees, and experiences youth had living in the rural community

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were all strong influences in developing youth's perceptions of success and future plans.

Additionally, the participants in this study identified the impact of the rural context on

their perceptions of success and plans for achievement. Rural youth in this study

recognized they needed to leave the community to pursue educational, occupational, and

economic opportunities. However, many hoped to use those opportunities to facilitate

their return to life in the rural area. With the development of modern tools and increases

in commuting, youth no longer see the desire to live in a rural community while

accessing many urban benefits as a conflict of aspirations. Taking advantage of the

resources in urban areas post-high school graduation may allow some youth to return to

their rural communities and achieve success.

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APPENDIX A
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A SAMPLE OF DEFINITIONS FOR ADOLESCENCE

TABLE. A Sampler of Definitions for Adolescence

Agency or Organization	Age Range
1. American Academy of Pediatrics	F*: Early: ages 10–13 y
	mid: ages 13–16 y
	M: early: ages 12–14 y
	mid: ages 14–17 y
	M/F: Late: ages 18–19 y
	adolescent/young adult: age 20+
2. American College of Physicians	Ages 12–24 y
3. American Academy of Family Physicians	Ages 13–18 y
4. Society for Adolescent Medicine	No uniform definition
5. Office of Technology Assessment	Ages 10–18 y
6. Department of Health and Human Services US Public Health Service	
• *National Institutes of Health*	
a. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development	Including, but not restricted to, ages 12–19 y
b. National Institute for Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke	The period between late childhood and early adulthood
c. National Center for Research Resources	Puberty to maturity
• *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*	
a. Division of Adolescent and School Health	Ages 10–19 y
b. Division of Reproductive Health	Ages 12–19 y
c. Center for Infectious Diseases, Division of HIV/AIDS	Ages 13–19 y
d. National Center for Health Statistics	Ages 10–14 and 15–19 y
• *Health Resources and Services Administration's Bureau of Health Care Delivery and Assistance*	
a. Homeless programs	Ages 15–19 y
b. Perinatal programs	Under age 15 and ages 15–19 y
7. US Department of Education	Generally considered to be in grades 7–12
8. US Department of Agriculture	Age guidelines of 9–19 y
9. US Department of Labor	Primarily age 16 and over
10. US Department of Transportation	Ages 10–20 y
11. US Department of Defense	Two military services use 10–18 y and two use 12–18 y
12. World Health Organization	Ages 10–24 y
13. United Nations	Ages 15–24 y
14. Adolescent Medicine Textbooks	
a. Hofmann A, Greydanus D. *Adolescent Mecicine.* Norwalk, CT: Appleton & Lange; 1989	Early: ages 11–14 y
	Mid: ages 14–17 y
	Late: ages 17–21 y
b. Neinstein LS. *Adolescent Health Care: A Practical Guide.* Munich: Urban & Schwarzenberg; 1991	Early: ages 12–14 y (junior high)
	Mid: 15–17 y (high school)
	Late: 18–21 y (college/4 y after high school)

* Abbreviations: F, female; M, male; HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; AIDS, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome; y, year.

(Grace & Patrick, 1994)

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EXAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Initial Information (Based on the Texas Healthy Adolescent Initiative Interview Guide)

Howdy, my name is _First and Last Name_ and I am a graduate student at Texas A&M University. I will be interviewing you today and will be taking notes as we talk. I am working on a project for my Master's Degree, so that I can better understand the perceptions of adolescent girls in _a rural community_ concerning the resources that facilitate and inhibit their successful transition to adulthood. You have been asked to participate because you are a young women who lives in _this rural area_ and your experiences may provide some valuable insight. I plan to use the information you share to promote positive youth development and help youth workers form better programs. Before we begin, let me tell you about this interview and ask you about any initial questions you may have.

An interview is a method of research for collecting information through asking questions. I am interested in your own thoughts, feelings, and opinions on each topic. Everything you say in this interview will be kept private and no names will be used in my report. It is very important to me that you give me your honest opinion. I will be recording your comments today to review and summarize in a report. The recordings will be kept confidential.

Our interview will last about one hour. Please speak clearly and share your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers.

Do you have any questions? Are you okay with me turning on the recorder?

(Based on the instrument used in Ley, 1996)

1.) Please introduce yourself and tell me a little about who you are and how you ended

up in *this rural area*.

- What is your name and age?

- What will be your grade level in the fall?

- Do you live in *this rural area*? If so, how long have you lived *here*?

- If you moved *here*, why?

- Have there been any changes in the area since you moved here?

- Do you have family *here*?

- What are your views about the community in which you live?

2.) What does it mean to you to be successful at your age, right now?

3.) What is needed to be successful as an adult?

- What could keep a person from accomplishing those goals? How?

4.) What are your goals for being an adult?

- What are your goals after high school?

5.) What do you think you need to accomplish those goals?

- How do you plan on reaching those goals?

    o How did you make this plan? What or who contributed to you

    forming this plan, if anything or anyone?

- Are there any skills that will help you reach your goals?

- Do you feel like you have access to things or people that can help you

    develop the needed skills?

    o Do you have access within the community?

    o Are there things for which you have to go outside of the community?

6.) How do you think living in this community affects your ability to reach your goals?

7.) What could keep you from accomplishing those goals?

8.) Why are these goals important to you?

9.) How do you think living in this community has impacted the formation of your

goals?

10.) What programs and resources are available in *this rural area*? Tell me a little about

them.

- Why are *these resources* important?

- Do you participate in any of these programs?

    o   Why are you involved in *these programs*?

    o   What do you do?

    o   Will participating in *these programs* help you later in life? How?

    o   Will participating in *these programs* make anything more difficult for

        you later in life? How?

    o   Are these programs helping you meet your goals?

11.) If you want information about jobs or health or if you have questions about different

things – sex, relationships, belief systems, places to get help – where could you go?

- Where do you actually get your information from?

- Do you feel like there are other places you want to get information from, but can't or try not to? Why?

- Is there anything you'd like to know more about, but feel like isn't accessible? Why?

- Is there information that is easier for you to get because you live in a rural area? Why do you say that?

- Is there information that is harder to get because you live in a rural area? What information and why?

- Is there information that is easier for you to get because you are a girl? What is it and why do you think that?

- Is there information that is harder to get because you are a girl? What information do you think that is?