

A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF YOUTH RESILIENCE IN RURAL NOVA SCOTIA

by

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the salient risk factors and protective processes for young people living in rural Atlantic Canadian contexts exhibiting the adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts associated with rural restructuring. Nineteen participants (10 males and 9 females) aged 18 to 23 years in Shore Central Hants County took part in a qualitative study that used a unique combination of narrative, visual, and observational methods, including photo-elicitation, videotaping a *'day in the life'* of participants, field notes, life-space mapping, and in-depth interviews.

Drawing on development-in-context and social constructionist perspectives, social constructionist grounded theory was generated to explain *when, how, and why* varying resilience processes were used by different kinds of young people to cope with the challenges produced by deterioration in the rural economic base. Conceptual links were drawn between youths' alternate wellbeing constructions; their place-relationships; the ways in which youth contribute to their own resilience; the structures and agencies that shape their capacities to draw upon certain resources, supports and resilience processes; and their decisions about whether to stay in their rural communities or out-migrate. Resilience was found to involve a responsive and supportive relationship between youth and the social, structural, environmental and spatial aspects of their rural places. Resilience-fostering environments enabled youth to respond to developmental risks through processes of: positive adjustment that improved youth-place compatibility; processes of negotiation or transformation that resolved incompatibility between self and place; and the maintenance of systems considered compatible.

Suggestions were provided for ways in which policy makers and community members can create resilience-promoting rural environments for youth, their families and communities.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

NRP	Negotiating Resilience Project
RRC	Resilience Research Centre
CRCHD	Centre for Research on Culture and Human Development
DITL	Day in the Life

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This research could not have happened without the participation of 19 bright, strong and determined young men and women living in Shore Central Hants County. Their stories are the heart of this dissertation, and I hope I have done their contributions justice. Their experiences demonstrate the strengths of young people, their families and their communities to respond to the challenges associated with rural restructuring. It was an honor to learn from them.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROLOGUE

Chiseri-Strater (1996) writes that when she reads manuscripts wherein the researcher refrained from reflecting on their positionality, their internal conflicts, or the “messiness of making meaning of her data” (p. 126), she is left disappointed. Removing the self from the research picture denies the reader an informed interpretation of the data (Prosser, 2000). My personal, educational, and work histories enmesh to influence who I am today. They instigate and reinforce my passion for understanding the kinds of routes rural youth take to resilience and provide the backbone to the kind of researcher I have become. The idea of using a prologue to reflexively position myself in the research came from reading Margaret Kovach’s (2010) book, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. She said, “We know what we know from where we stand. We need to be honest about that” (p. 7). The prologue is an opportunity to reflect on my background, assumptions, and theoretical inclinations, so that the reader can understand that the socially constructed research decisions and outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) are “situated in a time, place, and context” (Kovach, 2010, p. 21). The query becomes, however, “Just how much of myself do I expose?” Finlay (2002) puts this quandary eloquently when she states:

The challenge is to negotiate a path through this complicated landscape – one that exposes the traveller to interesting discoveries while ensuring a route out the other side. Researchers have to negotiate the ‘swamp’ of interminable self-analysis and self-disclosure. On their journey, they can all too easily fall into the mire of the infinite regress of excessive self-analysis and deconstructions at the expense of focusing on the research participants and developing understanding. Reflexive analysis is always

problematic. Assuming it is even possible to pin down something of our intersubjective understandings, these are invariably difficult to unfold, while confessing to methodological inadequacies can be uncomfortable (p. 212).

I grew up in Hants County, where this research takes place, with my fingers in the soil, salt water on my face, and my feet bare and muddy in the forests. My whole body feels at home when I am at our sprawling homestead. My earliest memories involve big, extended family gatherings, music vibrating through our old farm house, dancing in the rain during thunder and lightning storms, and being read books like *The Back of the North Wind* and *The Secret Garden* by my Mom before bed. My siblings and I were always outside—running through brooks, catching skippers, and exploring the woods. We had a small hobby farm, so every morning and night we had chores. The menagerie of animals were and still are a huge part of our lives. We learned about planting, weeding, harvesting, and preserving food by doing it together as a family. The first vehicle I ever drove was a tractor at age 10, which Dad taught me to drive so that I could help with the haying. Our door was always open. My grandmothers were a huge influence in my life. They were both fiery souls who taught me so much about keeping a sense of humour, the value of hard work, and resilience. We thought of our aunts and uncles as extra moms and dads, and our cousins as brothers and sisters. We grew up enveloped in an odd mix of oral history passed down the generations, nostalgia, laughter, invention, and practicality. We did not follow other people's traditions, but rather created our own. I was always busy and never bored. High school was a bit of a whirlwind, with chores and extra-curricular activities after school. I played competitively on every sports team our high school offered; took fiddle and piano lessons (eventually competing in fiddle); played with our high school band; and competed in public speaking.

My father, an engineer and a farmer, and my mother, a teacher and hiking guide, are smart, hardworking, and funny. They were never dry for dreaming up adventures and making them happen. It wasn't until high school that I realized that we, like so many other families in the area, were really struggling financially. Dad, of Russian heritage, left Canada to work in Russia on and off for 7 years amidst several economic crashes. When respondents in this study told me of the stress and repeated transitions they go through each time a partner or parent leaves and returns from work in another part of the country, I could relate. It was difficult to have Dad so far away, but I will always be extremely grateful that his work in Russia, and the sacrifices Mom made at home, helped support myself and my siblings to attend university.

In the midst of financial struggle and Dad being gone, we became really adept at 'finding' money and using what we had in creative ways. We covered holes in the wall with blankets; learned how to fix almost everything in the barn with bailer twine; and got accustomed to playing 'point': eating what we had while pretending it was some other meal. We ate like kings in the summer because of our gardens. We became closer and more resourceful because of our challenges. Even with the anxiety of just barely scraping by hanging over our heads, we never wanted for what I think are the most important things in life: family, love, nature, and adventure. We were never rich in money, but we were extremely rich in love. I still know the physical and mental weight that comes from financial scarcity, but I have to remind myself that thanks to my family I can be sure I will always have a roof over my head. Not everyone is as fortunate.

Not having money never seemed to stop my parents from providing us every opportunity they could. We had what Corbett (2007b) calls 'mobility capital.' Every four years my parents would take us out of school for a year to live in another country, where they home-schooled us.

We ran the ancient race track in Olympia, and learned about Achilles in Marathon. I rubbed my head on Einstein's desk in Zurich. We were in Russia during the major economic crash of 1994 and visited the Berlin wall in 1990. My most instrumental educational experiences occurred outside the classroom, even though I also loved learning in school. We were comfortable speaking with people from all walks of life; had exposure to diverse cultures; and had overflowing bookshelves. Travel taught me so much about myself. I learned how to laugh really hard at my follies and often thought, "If I make it out of this alive, it's going to be a great story." I developed serious wanderlust. I gained knowledge about the kindness of strangers. I learned resourcefulness, ethics, confidence, compassion, an openness to different ways of seeing the world, and adaptability. I believe all of these qualities are carried forward in my approach to life and research.

The things I witnessed in my travels planted a deep desire in me to work with and learn from people. However, like many other rural youth, I felt that in order to pursue my dreams and acquire the best possible education, I needed to leave home. There was never even a question in my head of whether I could stay in my rural community. At that time, online education was not a possibility, and it never dawned on me that I could live at home and drive back and forth to school like many of the participants in this study. Still, even if I had considered these options, I would have gone anyway. I craved new experiences, to achieve at school, to make a positive contribution through my work, and to explore where my opportunities would take me.

I never heard the word 'resilience' until later in my education. Looking back, I can see how my personal experiences, interest in learning about people from diverse cultures, and educational path led me to study resilience and positive youth and community development. My formal education is interdisciplinary in itself: an Honours degree in Psychology, Bachelor of

Science degree from Acadia University; a Master of Arts in International Development Studies from Dalhousie University; and my current Interdisciplinary PhD studies at Dalhousie University. My explorations in these programs provided the foundation that grew into the current doctoral work on youth resilience processes in transforming contexts. At Acadia, I wrote my thesis on gender differences in stress and coping under the guidance of Dr. Peter McLeod. At Dalhousie University, my Master's research explored resilience processes for youth in post-Soviet Russia. This work, supervised by Dr. Liesl Gambold, sparked my interest in understanding the altering relationships between self-concept, empowerment, and resilience when broader, macro-level forces are themselves transforming.

I feel very fortunate that along my path, I was introduced to scholars, policy makers and community development practitioners who generously provided me opportunities to develop as a person, community member, researcher, writer, and educator. My work with the Centre for Research on Culture and Human Development (under the guidance of Dr. Callaghan), the Negotiating Resilience Project at the Resilience Research Centre (under the guidance of Dr. Ungar, Dr. Liebenberg, and Dr. Cameron) and with Genuine Progress Index Atlantic (under the guidance of Gwendolyn Colman) were particularly instrumental. Each of these projects provided me the opportunity to coordinate international teams, as well as to supervise and help interns and young researchers develop their skills and find their own passions. My involvement in each of these projects allowed me to be intensively involved in working directly with youth, as well as writing grant proposals, collaborating on reports and articles, and presenting my work at peer-reviewed and invited conferences around the world. The people and encounters at each of these stops along my path that I was so fortunate to be part of instilled in me the insight that there will be people who show incredible fortitude and integrity even in the most dire circumstances. I

learned that most often the solutions for dealing with adversity are already present in the community. I witnessed how the alternative systems in which youth across cultures are embedded also shape different ways of understanding resilience and of how to thrive while living rurally.

For these, among other reasons, I take a social constructionist stance in the work I do; because it honors the possibility of multiple truths and ways of seeing, being, and experiencing. Readers will no doubt recognize as they read my thesis that my own research proclivities provided “points of departure” (Charmaz, 2006, p.17) or frames of prior theoretical knowledge and interest that, though subjected to rigorous reflection and scrutiny (Charmaz, 2008), certainly influenced the lenses through which I conducted this doctoral research and interpreted the data.

Just as my educational path led me away from Hants County, it brought me back again. Returning to this rural place was also the grounding I needed following several years of tremendous personal and family losses that left me reeling. There was not time to grieve one loss, before there was another, then another. Some are too personal to divulge here. Just as my values and history undoubtedly influenced my approach to studying rural youth resilience, my experience of undertaking research in the place where I grew up changed me too. It caused me to revisit my understanding of myself and what I aspire to in life. It reiterated for me the healing powers of nature, family, and community involvement. Finally, I had the strange sensation of a veil being lifted, of finally emerging out of the blur of those painful days.

Just as I started feeling like (a version of) my optimistic, energetic self again, my interviews with youth began. My quest was to understand how youth perceived and coped with the challenges in their lives. Some of the adversities they disclosed were often very different from what I had gone through, and some were very much the same. Regardless, I do feel that my

own trials left me feeling highly attuned to the stories of resilience youth shared with me. I kept track of my own emotions, taking steps to critically analyze which feelings were my own and which were those presented by the participants. The method of grounded theory aids in this process by obliging the researcher to first code the interview or transcribed visual data line-by-line and then to link these detailed codes to actions and processes evident in the data. The method ensures development of an audit trail that connects the analysis back to the codes grounded directly to instances in the data.

Returning to live in the place where I grew up made me see how the area had changed. West Gore has always been small, but when I was a teenager, our community had two corner stores, a gas station, and a feed store. Now all of those businesses are gone. There used to be gold and gypsum mining not far away but they ceased production in the 1980s. There used to be a lot of family farms, but most have closed their doors or gone bankrupt over the past 10 years. Our property is one of the only old growth forests left in an area emblazoned with scars from clear cutting. The firehall and the church are the only community buildings left standing. In 2010, my family moved a church that was going to be torn down onto our property, where we now hold community art and music gatherings. Going back even further still, West Gore used to house one of the first colleges in Nova Scotia where women could study. There was a dentists' office; and nurses, doctors, and educators lived and worked here.

I have explained for the reader my own multifaceted reasons for leaving and returning to my rural community. My rural core never left me, even as I incorporated new skills and ways of viewing the world. I am suited to rural life, though I believe I am adaptable enough to live anywhere, including a city. My history, the land, my family, the forests - those are the threads that will forever connect my heart to Hants County, even when I am away. My experiences and

who I have become drive my passion for this work. It is my hope that in this dissertation, I have been able to adequately capture youth participants' constructions of resilience, the various resilience processes they use, and the time-sensitive and conditional nature of the residential decisions they make. The notions of complexity and entwinement are important: Thanks to my discussions with Dr. Ungar, I have realized that it is not by focussing on what seems to be clear cut (the black and white), but by wading into the quagmire of the grey areas that the most interesting and profound realizations emerge.

Being rural and studying rural lives is a way to resist oppressive paradigms, when compounded with the intense scrutiny of one's background, assumptions, and potential blind spots. Any research is deeply political, and I believe that rural voices that have been pushed to the periphery for so long need to be heard and acknowledged. Helping to make the invisible 'visible' is a matter of social justice. What we research in turn impacts policy and rural programs, and these policies and interventions need to be responsive and appropriate to the people they affect. Of utmost priority in my mind is including youths' voices around discussions of resilience, so that we may foster contextually-relevant resources, processes, and community development initiatives that serve to nurture youth resilience.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

*No hills of maples, no little grove of birch
Not a tree left standing in the woods we love so much
I'm afraid mistakes we've made cannot be reconciled
There's an ill wind blowing down the road
I can see the dust for miles*

*No ballgames in the evening, with the supper dishes done
All the kids are leaving, leaving one by one
They're telling me there's got to be something more worthwhile
I watch them going down the road
I can see the dust for miles*

*Old souls all around me will not lay to rest
My father's voice among them, how did it come to this?
Now I am left all by myself with neither chick nor child
There's an ill wind blowing up the road
I can see the dust for miles*

(Dust, by Betty Belmore, from *These Fields*, released 2013)

In the above verses selected from the song *Dust*, singer, songwriter, and musician Betty Belmore mourns for her childhood community that has been laid waste by clear cutting and out-migration. Only the voices of ancestors echo through the night, the lively energy of youth long gone from the former gold mining town. Folk artists and academics alike have long lamented the exodus of youth from rural farming, fishing, and mining towns. Perhaps different in the 21st Century is the accelerated rate at which young people are leaving rural places (Chaundy, 2012), as well as the new ways in which macro-level forces are triggering socioeconomic, environmental, and political reorganizations in rural communities (Parkins & Reed, 2013). Globalization, transformations in domestic policy frameworks, economic boons and busts, urban-centric policies (Fairbairn, 1998; Markey, Halseth & Manson, 2008; Parkins & Reed, 2013), and changes in communication, technological, and transportation systems (Green & Meyer, 1997; Laegran, 2002) have created new kinds of pressures and opportunities for rural

young people. Faced with the removal of local services and facilities (Halseth & Ryser, 2006; Ryser, Manson & Halseth, 2013), the collapse of locally-based agriculture, fisheries, and forestry work (Marshall, 2001; Randal & Ironside, 1996), and limited availability of post-secondary educational opportunities (Looker & Naylor, 2009; Stockdale, 2006), young people are leaving rural Atlantic Canada at unprecedented rates. Between 2004 and 2011, approximately 2200 people permanently left rural areas in Nova Scotia for another province, predominantly to Alberta (Chaundy, 2012). The highest portion of individuals out-migrating from Nova Scotia are rural young people aged 15 to 29 (Chaundy, 2012). The Community Foundation of Nova Scotia (2014) reports that from 2009 to 2013, “the number of people leaving Nova Scotia for other provinces in Canada annually increased by more than seven times from 751 to 5,877, while the number of those under 25 years leaving the province increased by more than four times from 681 to 2,921” (p.5). Not only is the out-migration of youth a substantial concern for the vitality of rural places (Chaundy, 2012; Dupuy et al., 2000), the youth who stay are left vulnerable to poverty, stress (Senate Standing Committee Report, 2006), unmet health care needs (Mitura & Bollman, 2003), work dissatisfaction (Looker & Naylor, 2009; McGrath, 2001), and to marginalization, isolation, and social exclusion (McGrath, 2001; Trell, van Hoven & Huigen, 2012; Valentine et al., 2008).

Some youth, however, have been able to cope well with the challenges confronting them in economically and otherwise burdened rural communities. The current dissertation documents a study of youth resilience in rural Shore Central, Hants County, Nova Scotia, Canada. It examines how young people living there perceive the risks they face. It unravels, from the standpoints of participants, the protective processes, resources, supports, and structures that

enable positive development in contexts under stress. It answers three questions critical to the wellbeing of rural youth, their families, and their communities:

- Which youth are staying in rural communities following high school, which youth are leaving, and why?
- What are the mechanisms through which youth deal with personal, family, and community challenges, especially those attributable to or exacerbated by processes of rural restructuring?
- Which policy and community interventions can be initiated to enhance the lives and livelihoods of rural youth, their families, and their communities?

More specifically, the objectives of the research were to:

- understand from youths' perspectives the complex risks and vulnerabilities they face in rural Atlantic Canada;
- examine the relationships between history, policy, identity, social systems, economies, and resilience discourse in rural Atlantic Canada;
- illustrate the interactive processes and negotiations youth engage in to attain wellbeing despite the adversities they face;
- identify which youth are staying in rural communities following high school, which youth are leaving, and why;
- pinpoint the conditions, resources, support structures, and strategies that, from youths' perspectives, foster their positive development in rural areas;
- and demonstrate concrete opportunities for rural enhancement that may improve the lives and livelihoods of the participants and their communities.

To date there are no known reports available on youth resilience and community restructuring for rural Shore Central Hants County using first-voice accounts of youths' experiences. The study of the ways in which rural youth interact within their communities to access the psychological, social, cultural, educational, and occupational, resources essential to their positive development, can impart critical lessons on how to enhance the capability of other rural Atlantic Canadian youth to respond to similar challenges. Moreover, the knowledge generated through dialogue with rural youth who are often overlooked in the resilience discourse can provide crucial information about how to create environments that foster resilience for a broad range of young people.

In section 1.3 of the Introduction, I introduce the reader to the research context. I outline the demographic, mobility, and occupational transitions occurring in rural Hants County, where ongoing changes in communities over the past 20 years have produced significant challenges to be addressed by youth. The data point to a rapidly aging population, substantial out-migration of youth, and key shifts in youths' employment, education, and mobility patterns. These transformations have, in turn, sparked important changes in youths' personal, social, and spatial relations.

In section 1.4, I present the structure and content of the upcoming chapters, which include the Literature Review, the Methodology, three Findings chapters, two Discussion chapters, and the Conclusion.

1.3 THE RESEARCH SETTING

This study examines the pathways to resilience for youth living in rural communities situated within and along the border of a subsection of Hants County, Nova Scotia. For the purposes of the research, the area is entitled Shore Central, East Hants. The specific names of the communities where youth participants live will not be identified, in order better to protect the identities of participants. Shifts within the economic context of Shore Central are altering the spatial, cultural, economic, and social bases of rural life. Figure 1 shows the research site of Shore Central, highlighted in red.

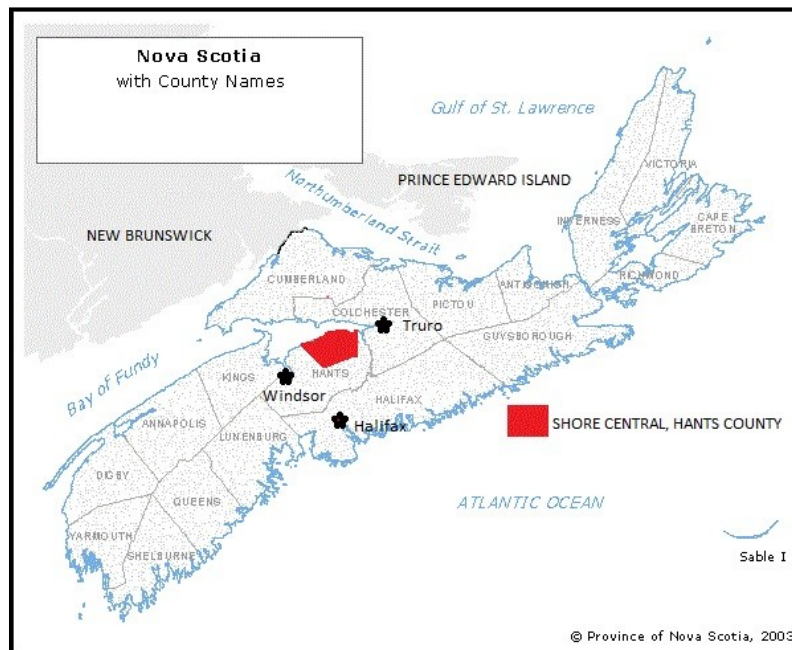


Figure 1 Research Site. 2003 Province of Nova Scotia county map, revised to show location of Shore Central, Hants County, Nova Scotia, and closest towns.

Though some reports for Hants County have been published using Statistics Canada census data (i.e. Colchester East Hants Health Authority's Population Health Report, 2009; East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2012; Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2008), the data are often aggregated to the county level (Langille et al., 2006), which makes it difficult

to obtain information for localities with small populations within rural counties. Most recently, government budget cuts have made determining trends specific to the communities that make up the research site an even greater obstacle. The online Nova Scotia Community Counts website that allowed researchers to find Statistics Canada data organized by community, police or electoral districts, was cut from the Nova Scotia budget in April, 2015 (CBC News, 2015). What *can* be determined from the literature available are some important trends related to a rapidly aging population, the dramatic out-migration of young people from the area, and shifts in the economic and occupational patterns.

1.3.1 Population and Mobility Trends

East Hants is predominantly rural, covering 1909 square kilometres, and has a population density of 12.4 people per square kilometer (Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2008). The population of East Hants is approximately 23,195 people, which represents a population increase of 3.3 % since 2006 (Statistics Canada Census of Population, 2011, as cited in the Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2012) and 50% since 1961 (Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report, n.d.). The movement of people into East Hants has been concentrated to what are called the Corridor communities of Lantz, Elmsdale, Enfield, and Milford (Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2008). The close proximity of the Corridor communities to Halifax makes them prime locations for commuting to work in the city. Very different patterns emerge outside the Corridor communities. As the Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report explains:

In recent decades, the share of rural East Hants has fallen dramatically. There are two different patterns in East Hants. Suburban communities are growing quickly. Rural communities are losing people, or stagnant...Meanwhile, young people are leaving rural

communities. The workforce is aging, and traditional industries are evolving. Population decline hurts rural economies and makes it more costly to deliver basic services (p.6).

The Shore Central area of East Hants is encountering significant population decline and rapid out-migration, particularly with youth just finishing high school (Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2008; Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report, n.d.). As mentioned above, the specific names of the communities where youth participants live will not be identified; however, a closer examination of the 2011 Census of Population data reveals that most of the communities that make up the research site have experienced between a 1% to 16 % loss of population since 1991 (Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2008; Municipality of East Hants Municipality of East Hants, n.d). Even more drastically, one of the research communities has undergone a 39% loss of population between 1996 and 2006 (Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2008). A key issue with the aggregated census data for areas within Hants County is that information for many, smaller communities is compiled under one heading, which consequently masks the realities occurring across each of the smaller communities. For example, the 2011 Census of Population shows that one geographic area within Shore Central East Hants is gaining inhabitants (up 4.6% since 2001), yet one questions whether the rapid influx of inhabitants to one of the communities included under the broader banner skews the out-migration statistics for the other communities included within that category.

Three other population trends are important to mention. First, Hants County's population is aging, with a large section (38%) of its residents over the age of 50 (Hants Regional Development Authority Business Report, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2013). The median age in East Hants is 41.3 years, and in the Shore Central area of the municipality, the median age is even

higher. In the research communities, median ages range from 42.5 to 50 years (Canadian Census of Population, 2011, as cited in the Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report, n.d.). The Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report warns that as the population continues to age, the labour and housing markets will face dramatic alterations. Second, even though children and youth under age 20 make up 26.9 percent of the population of East Hants (Community Counts, 2011, as cited in Maher, Shaw, & Tiniakos-Doran, 2013), the retention of young people following high school, especially in the more rural locations of East Hants, is a key challenge (Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report, n.d.; Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2008; Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2012). In 2011, young people aged 20 to 30 years made up just under 10 percent of East Hants' population, compared to 12.1 percent of Nova Scotia's population (Statistics Canada, 2012). The Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report (n.d.) states that, "Like many rural and small town communities, East Hants has trouble retaining young people" (p. 11). Likewise, the Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study (2012) reports that there is a "visible population drop in the age groups of 20 to 24 years and 25 to 29 years. This drop may be related to fact that there are no post secondary educational institutes in East Hants and that many young people may move out of the Municipality to complete their schooling" (p. 11). Lastly, compared to other counties in Nova Scotia (such as West Hants, HRM, Colchester, Kings, and Nova Scotia in general), East Hants reports fewer immigrants moving to its communities. In East Hants, immigrants make up only 2.4 percent of the population, compared to 2.8 percent in West Hants, 8.1 percent in Halifax Regional Municipality, 3.4 percent in Colchester, 4.3 percent in Kings County, and 5.3 percent in Nova Scotia (Canadian Census of Population, 2011, as cited in Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report, n.d.).

1.3.2 Economic, Educational and Occupational Patterns and Shifts

According to the Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report (n.d.), two contrasting patterns are evident in the work-force participation rates and economic realities for people in East Hants. East Hants' unemployment rate in 2011 was 7%, down from 13% in 1996. These apparent economic opportunities seem to be primarily concentrated within the Corridor communities. In the community sites where the research took place, employment rates range from 55.9% to 59.5%, while the unemployment rates range from 10.8% to 11.4% (National Household Survey, 2011, as cited in Nova Scotia Community Counts, 2013). The majority of East Hants' workforce is employed in sales and services (22%) and trades and transportation (22%). Only 4% of the population have occupations in the resources and agricultural industries (National Household Survey, 2011, as cited in Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report, n.d.). The 192 farms operating within the Municipality, 38 of which are dairy farms, make up 5% of the total farms operating in Nova Scotia. The average age of a farmer in East Hants is 52 years old; only 25 farm operators are aged 35 and under (East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2012). The 2012 Hants Regional Development Authority Business Report states that Hants County continues to experience lingering effects of the recession, such as the laying off workers, particularly in sectors of natural resources, manufacturing, and tourism.

Perhaps the most dramatic indications of the strained occupational context are the statistics related to low income and long work-commutes. Almost one quarter of the population in private households in one of the research communities (24.9%) report low-income status. The low income status is almost 50% higher than the rate of 17.4% for the population in private households across Nova Scotia. The low-income rates for the other research communities range from 16.9% to 22.6% (Statistics Canada's Community Profiles, 2011).

East Hants' small commercial sector, the decreasing number of employment options in its rural areas, and instrumental shifts in the types of work people are doing, means that about half (52%) of all employed individuals work outside of East Hants and most commute to the Halifax Regional Municipality (Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report, n.d.). The percentage of residents from Shore Central commuting long distances for work is dramatically higher. In the communities where the research took place, between 95.5% to 98.3% of the working population uses a vehicle to commute to work, with a median commute time of 39 minutes (Statistics Canada's Community Profiles, 2011, as cited in Nova Scotia Community Counts, 2013). Residents living in some of the communities where the research took place, however, have a one and a half hour commute *each way* to and from work or school.

There are no colleges or universities in Shore Central, so rural students must commute up to an hour to attend educational institutions after high school. The percentage of the population having a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree in the communities where the research occurred range from 39.8% to 42.9% (Statistics Canada's Community Profiles, 2011, as cited in Nova Scotia Community Counts, 2013), compared to 53.8% of the population in Nova Scotia (Statistics Canada National Household Survey, 2011, as cited in Nova Scotia Community Counts, 2013).

1.3.3 Community Services, Resources and Assets

A Hants County Asset and Resource Map was developed for the Hants Regional Development Authority by Pyra Management Consulting Services in 2012. The report shows that while East Hants has a number of physical, financial, and other services and assets accessible to residents, these resources are not evenly distributed. Emergency services, like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Emergency Health Service (EHS), and hospitals are

available to Shore Central residents. However at the time of the research, the services are based approximately 35-45 minutes drive away in Truro, Elmsdale, or Windsor. Since the onset of this study, a remote RCMP station has been established within the research setting. Volunteer fire departments are located in most of the communities where the research took place, and volunteer members are the official first responders in case of an emergency. Community health centres are situated within or close to the research communities. The Asset Map indicates that East Hants has fertile soil, microclimates, natural physical beauty, local festivals, elementary and high schools, and some companies, among other benefits. Internet service has reached some but not all areas in Hants County. In Shore Central, there are no formal recreational facilities and there is no public transportation system.

In East Hants, most homes are owned privately, resulting in few rental options for younger residents. According to the Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report (n.d.), 86% of the housing options in East Hants are owned, and only 14% are rented. Consequently, young people live with their families, move to other places in search of work and residence, or spend a significant amount of their income on rent. In 2000, 45.4% of the people renting their homes and 13.4% of the people owning their homes in East Hants spent more than 30% of their income on shelter costs, which is a key indicator of poverty (Colchester East Hants Health Authority, 2009).

1.3.4 Why are these trends and transitions important to note?

The statistics I provide above reveal ongoing adjustments in population, employment, and mobility data in Shore Central. They show, however, only part of the picture of restructuring within rural Shore Central. More important is that these numbers allude to the changing nature of the opportunity structures (Ungar, 2011) available to youth in their communities and the resultant

adaptations that must occur in the ways that youth view, make plans for, and organise their lives. Against these figures, it becomes apparent that there are not only social and economic differences between areas of East Hants, or in Nova Scotia more broadly, but that “the redistribution of opportunities and life chances among rural households occurs in significantly unequal terms” (McGrath, 2001, p.481).

The overwhelming lack of local career and training possibilities propels many young people out of the Shore Central Hants County area, which in turn affects the quality and availability of other social, economic, and health resources (Municipality of East Hants Community Inventory Report, n.d.). If healthy, resilience-promoting communities can be distinguished—at least in part—by the occupational resources that it offers its work-aged members (Ryser et al., 2013; Ungar et al., 2007), then the paucity of viable, quality work options in this area presents itself as a major risk factor for young people. According to research conducted by Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006), youth perceptions of the occupational opportunities available to them are the strongest predictors of whether they will intend to migrate, even when they want to stay living in their rural community.

Where the study participants live (their geographic locations) simultaneously underlies, limits, and opens new educational and occupational avenues. The data outlined above vividly point to the distance youth must travel to access educational, occupational, health, and other resources and services. Halseth and Ryser (2006) add that the implications of fewer services and occupational opportunities are even more significant in rural towns because, “they must now bear the costs of traveling to regional centres in order to access these needed services. In the case of employment insurance and social assistance, these costs are relatively more important since the reason for accessing such services arises from an economic challenge” (p.81). These

challenges are compounded further by the fact that Shore Central has no public transportation system, as mentioned above.

Research conducted by Halseth and Ryser (2006) demonstrates just how detrimental the lack or loss of services is to the sustainability of rural communities. Halseth and Ryser use data from a seven-year study of service availability in 19 rural sites across Canada to make the case that services provide stability and quality of life in rural and small town places, and are vital to community rejuvenation during times of economic and social restructuring. Without services, there is no draw for businesses or other resources and services to take root. They argue that service closures result in heightened local uncertainty, an impaired ability to cope with stress and change, and the increased likelihood of losing residents to out-migration.

According to the Hants Regional Development Authority (2012), youth in Hants County are currently experiencing significant spatial, cultural, economic, and social transformations. Yet, we know very little about what these transitions look like or how young people experience them. According to Brannen and her colleagues (2009), people from rural areas may experience poverty differently from their urban counterparts and may experience “hidden” vulnerabilities that challenge normative assumptions of risk and resilience. This study seeks to understand resilience in rural Shore Central, Hants County from youths’ own cultural and contextual standpoints. Doing so will make a major contribution to the literature regarding rural youth resilience and community restructuring.

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE UPCOMING CHAPTERS

There are nine chapters that comprise this dissertation: the Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodology, three Findings chapters, two Discussion chapters, and the Conclusion.

1.4.1 Literature Review

In the Literature Review, I mine the rural restructuring, resilience, and social change literatures to situate this research in its socio-historical and theoretical context. I discuss the defining features of rural restructuring, and shed light on the kinds of socio-political and economic transformations occurring in rural places. Varying approaches to understanding the meaning of ‘rural’ are explored, which include determinations based on geographical classification, cultural ideologies, the local economic base of the location, and social representation. I approached this research with the understanding that rural areas and rural lives are complex and varying, and that the effects of rural restructuring are far from consistent across diverse locations (McGrath, 2001; Randal & Ironside, 1996). Rural places are made distinctive through their unique social, historical, physical, economic, and natural features. Together these features serve to differentially shape the kinds of assets, risks, and opportunities youth are exposed to. I therefore used a process-focussed and contextualized approach that spoke to both the socio-political and structural factors that mould communities, as well as the ways in which youth understand, live within, and influence their rural places. These, among other factors, sculpt the developmental pathways and resilience process available to young people. I highlight key conceptual issues of resilience in this chapter; note the risk factors associated with rural restructuring for young people; illuminate the protective and promotive factors described in the

literature that are particularly relevant for youth in rural contexts; note key gaps in the literature that my research addresses; and discuss how my research makes advances in the field.

1.4.2 Research Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the study design, data collection methods, research sequence, and data analysis procedures. Innovative qualitative methods were employed to collect narrative, visual, and observational data. They included photo-elicitation, videotaping a '*day in the life*' of participants, field notes, life-space mapping, and in-depth interviews with 19 participants (10 males and 9 females) aged 19 to 23 in Shore Central Hants County. I justify my use of qualitative methods, and argue that if visual methods are engaged reflectively, they can: increase the authenticity of findings; minimize power and language barriers; shift control to the participants; engage youth to recognize individual and community assets; and produce new knowledge and understandings of social phenomena. My epistemological approach of social constructionism and my methodological approach of social constructionist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003; 2006; Clarke, 2005; Liebenberg, Didkowsky & Ungar, 2012) are explained and justified. These methodologies aided in capturing unanticipated relationships, and the multiplicities of meanings associated with youth resilience in the context of rural economic restructuring. To end the chapter, I review the tools I used to ensure the trustworthiness and adequacy of the data collected and analysis conducted. I speak in depth about the essential role reflexivity and reciprocity play in the current research. Ethical and procedural issues, and how these were dealt with, are also discussed.

1.4.3 Findings

There are three Findings chapters. In the first chapter (titled Youth-identified Risks), I discuss the risks young people in Shore Central reported they face in their rural communities. These included changes in the area's socio-economic conditions, transformations in employment options, long and dangerous commutes to work, the loss of services and stores in their rural communities, limited recreational facilities, and systemic rural disregard.

In the second Findings chapter (titled A Substantive Theory of Rural Youth Resilience), I focus on the ways that young people constructed meaning from their encounters within their ecologies. I provide evidence for the generation of a substantive theory that explains differences in youths' relationships with their rural places. The theory constructed helped interpret youths' migration intentions and variations in their pathways to resilience. More specifically, the theoretical framework is comprised of three core components: the quality of the youth-place relationship; the viability and availability of certain adaptation responses, given the structural constraints or opportunities in youths' rural environments; and the selection and use of various pathways to resilience. I show that the tensions between structure and personal agency affect the meanings youth make concerning the viability of potential actions, which further hinders or enables youths' positive development.

In the final Findings chapter (titled Youths' Diverse Routes to Resilience), I reveal four clusters of youth-place relationships, which are conceptually related to youths' patterned differences in their use of positive adaptations to deal with the developmental threats produced by rural restructuring. More specifically, I explain how youths' rural social and physical ecologies are differentially suited to each youth to foster the development of certain kinds of youth preferences, needs, and aspirations. Their development results in a range of relationships

between the youths and their rural places. In turn, the youths' place-relationships that are shaped by structural, economic, relational, and socio-political factors are shown to constrain or enable the viability, availability, and use of certain adaptation and migration-decision processes in their response to the risks associated with rural economic restructuring. In this chapter I explain how, under what conditions, by which youth, and with what consequences varying resilience processes were enabled to address economic, occupational, and other challenges. These resilience processes included: being mobile to access employment and other resilience-promoting resources elsewhere; intending to live here but work there; preparing to leave; living off the land; and/or embracing family and/or community-support systems.

1.4.4 Discussion

There are two Discussion chapters. In the first chapter (titled Key Findings and the Theoretical Implications), I review the key findings, in order to dispute, support, or expand upon other theoretical models. I then discuss the contributions to resilience theory made by the current study. In particular, this research advances the field of youth resilience by demonstrating how youths' relationships with places influence the kinds of adaptations they make to thrive in economically-strained contexts. Second, this research delves into the interconnections between macro-structural transformations and youth developmental processes.

In the second Discussion chapter (titled Policy and Development Applications), I detail how the findings may translate into policy and community interventions that promote rural youth resilience. I argue that place-focussed policy and community development will better address the risks facing rural youth by gathering and valuing context-specific knowledge; centering community participation and ownership in planning, design, and delivery; identifying and using place-based assets and strengths to address local problems; taking a proactive rather than reactive

approach to community change; and creating multilevel, collaborative, government structures. I also propose ways that policy makers, youth workers, educators, and community builders can create resilience-enabling rural places that foster youths' access to resources critical to enriching their lives and livelihoods. These resources include: investing in rural services and infrastructure; creating equitable systems and access to opportunities; offering place-based education, training, and capacity building; and supporting localization, innovation, and diversification to bolster the local economy.

1.4.5 Conclusion

In the final chapter, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literatures relevant to the research, and that help to frame the theory constructed in the research findings. In the findings, I document variations in youths' constructions of positive adaptation to the complex hurdles associated with processes of rural restructuring, as well as the other complex developmental risks they face. I then present substantive grounded theory to explain these diverse patterns. My aim in this chapter is to help the reader appreciate the socio-historical context within which the study takes place, and the theoretical context within which the research findings are conceptualized. I take the opportunity along the way to highlight key gaps in the literature that are addressed by this research.

I begin in section 2.2 by exploring four approaches to understanding the meaning of 'rural,' which include determinations based on geographical classification, cultural ideologies, the economic base of the location, and social representation. I briefly analyze aspects of the approaches in order to anchor my own stance in portraying 'the rural.' More precisely, I take a social constructionist and contextualized approach that recognizes the broader socio-political influences, power discourses, and structural factors that shape rural communities, as well as ways in which youth interpret, give meaning to, and co-create their experiences within rural contexts.

Next, in section 2.3, I provide an explanation of what rural restructuring is, the defining features, and how it has unfolded within Atlantic Canada's rural communities. I explain how domestic policy frameworks, interlinked with new global expectations and pressures, trigger rural economic reorganizations. These changes produce impacts at the community level and

consequently generate many of the risks and opportunities faced by young people, of which I expand upon in section 2.4

In section 2.4, I review the literature on the adversities that economic, social and geographic adjustments in rural contexts can pose to youth. I discuss how macro-scale modifications in technological, political, ideological, and economic systems (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000), can impact upon the local social systems and structures youth engage with on a daily basis.

In section 2.5, I argue that the theoretical construct of resilience is foundational to understanding the substantive grounded theory I present in the research findings. The study of youth resilience involves both the examination of potential risks (such as those imposed by rural restructuring) to youth development, and it delves into the positive processes that facilitate youths' successful adaptation to critical contextual and personal challenges. I provide a brief synopsis that describes the historical evolution of resilience research. I do so in order to present the broader theoretical context within which my work is situated, as well as to show the conceptual movements within the field that my research advances. I highlight key conceptual issues for consideration, and explicate the differences between the resilience construct, paradigms of risk, and theories of normative development.

Section 2.6 focuses on the protective factors identified in the literature that help to explain successful adjustment for youth experiencing personal, socio-cultural, economic and geographical challenges. I explain how individual, historical and contextual factors moderate the effects of socio-cultural, economic and environmental modifications on youth development. Then I explore the protective factors that fall within four mutually interdependent, ecological

systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sameroff, 2010) that influence youths' development: the individual, the family, the community, and the socio-political context.

In section 2.7, I present three interlocking and dynamic categories of processes central to understanding the research participants' experiences within their rural communities and constructions of positive adaptation to the challenges they face that will be discussed in relation to the research findings. These include processes related to: 1) meaning-making, 2) power and agency, and 3) constructions of self, space and place. The theoretical exploration in section 2.7 is intended to help explicate the diversities (and similarities) evident in youths' constructions of, and pathways to, resilience. A concluding statement is provided in section 2.8.

2.2 APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF “RURAL”

The term rural has been used inclusively to refer to widely varied places, including those characterized as: former or active farming communities; coastal and fishing villages; destinations for back-to-the-landers, tourists or retirees; areas of previous or current resource extraction; and Northern, remote or isolated settings, among others (Corbett, 2007a). To distinguish between areas so diverse, investigators generally use one of four varying approaches to identify and describe ‘rural’. The determinations are primarily based on: geographical and descriptive characteristics; cultural ideologies; the local economic-base; and/or social representation.

The *descriptive approach* to defining rural, or what Sandwell (2013) calls geographical classification, uses information such as population, population density and distance to an urban centre to determine whether a place is rural. The Statistics Canada Census of Population, for example, defines rural as settlements of fewer than 1000 people and with a population density of fewer than 400 people per square kilometer. Statistics Canada also assesses the gradation of rural and small towns in relation to urban influence (Parkins & Reed, 2013).

The *cultural classification* approach (Sandwell, 2013), or what Parkins and Reed (2013) describe as the *socio-cultural approach*, characterizes a place as rural based on a perceived and ideological way of life. In this approach, the distinction is generally made between idealized rural living and the “impersonal and dehumanizing experience of city life” (Parkins & Reed, 2013, p. 13). A number of scholars (See Jones, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000; Valentine, 1997; Valentine, Holloway, Knell, & Jayne, 2008), however, criticize depictions of the rural countryside as pure, simple, and idyllic. In these renderings, the rural is imagined as a wholesome place to grow up, unaffected and safe from the corruption and isolation of life in the city (Valentine et al., 2008). The idyllic rural encompasses both aesthetic and moral components:

aesthetically, the rural is described as picturesque, pristine and natural; morally, rural communities are generalized as close-knit, happy and cohesive (Kraack & Kenway, 2002). Matthews and his colleagues (2000) argue that if more studies were conducted *with* children and youth that sought a range of voices, the significant diversity in young people's experiences would be revealed. Their work vividly shows how youths' lives in rural areas can be far from perfect. They surveyed 372 children and youth aged 9 to 16 across 28 villages in rural Northamptonshire, England, and conducted in-depth discussions with youth aged 13-16. Matthews and his team (2000) found that rather than describing their childhoods as free from danger or idyllic, youth participants reported feeling a lack of power and a sense of isolation. Participants described how the available social spaces were often contested, with adults intervening to enforce order.

By contrast, 'the rural' has also been depicted as desolate, remote, deprived and degraded (McManus et al., 2012). In these portrayals, the rural is 'othered,' wherein rural people and rural life are represented as stagnant, backward, and unproductive (Corbett, 2006; 2007a; Stenbacka, 2011). Discourses of the rural are transmitted by images (Halfacree & Boyle, 1998) that are produced and played out in the media (Bye, 2009; Stenbacka, 2011). Both Stenbacka (2011) and Bye (2009) dissect popular 'reality' television shows in Sweden and Norway respectively, to demonstrate how discourses of urban versus rural (or right versus wrong/ modern versus backward) are perpetuated and then reproduced within rural and urban identities. Bye (2009), for example, shows how the rural Norwegian man is often depicted as a marginal 'loser':

Whereas 'to be something in life' is often synonymous with 'moving away' or 'leaving', it is generally the case that youths who remain in the countryside are associated with those who make little out of life and who are backward in relation to what is happening

‘out there.’ Hence, implicit in the expression ‘to stay behind’ is a modernist discourse of rurality which opposes traditional backward rurality to modern and progressive urbanism (p. 279).

This simplistic and dichotomous approach to determining what or where the rural is, depicts rural areas and people as homogenous, fails to acknowledge the interdependency between rural and urban locales, and ignores the fortitude and strengths shown by rural individuals and communities. New research reveals that although rural areas often face economic, land-use, and other pressures, some people see their connection to rural places as a source of strength, identity and resilience (Bhattacharyya, Baptiste, Setah, & William, 2013; Davis & Reed, 2013). Corbett’s (2005) research in Digby Neck, Nova Scotia, for example, points to the entrepreneurial resilience of the people who stayed and prospered despite adversities faced in the fishing industry. They did so by mobilizing their available family, economic, social, and cultural capital.

The *locality approach* to defining the rural, as described by Woods (2005), bases its assessment on the economic situation of the area. Parkins and Reed (2013) state that in practice, this approach tends to link notions of the rural with economies based in agriculture, fishing and forestry. The employment bases in rural areas are rapidly changing, however, and the impacts of rural restructuring are far from uniform (McGrath, 2001; Randall & Ironside, 1996). Pezzini (2000) explains that the changes in rural economies - and the development opportunities thereby presented - are shaped by the area’s geographical location, existing natural resources, proximity to markets, climate, industrial history, and the human, social and physical capitals positioned locally.

The economies of rural areas are also highly intertwined with those of urban areas (Green & Meyer, 1997; Pezzini, 2000; Reimer, 2013). Reimer (2013) states that a multi-level, highly interconnected system between rural and urban areas exists based on trade, service and governance institutions, shared environmental use and concern, and through the forging of identities. Rural areas deficient in job opportunities are more likely to have their inhabitants commute to urban areas for work, or relocate altogether (Green & Meyer, 1997). Rural areas close to metropolitan cities, on the other hand, may become bedroom communities as people move from the city into a location that provides “a rural aesthetic” (Green & Meyer, 1997, p. 164). Rural restructuring has led to unequal development, with some locations experiencing an influx of manufacturing companies, factories and call-centres to take advantage of inexpensive rural labour (Corbett, 2005).

Finally, Parkins and Reed (2013) highlight an emerging way of understanding the rural, which they call the *social representation approach*. This stance asserts that what gives a place meaning are the perspectives of those who live and visit there. Thus, the meaning of rural can be seen as a social construction, where the symbolism and value one attaches to a certain place may be shared with others or disputed (Liepins, 2000). This approach sits best with my social constructionist’s stance, explained in detail in the Research Methodology chapter. In this study, the contextual and cultural viewpoints of the participants are considered integral to understanding the meanings of rural. I am also alert to Liepins’ (2000) advice, which cautions that focusing solely on the meanings given to a community would be to the detriment of understanding the ways in which structural factors and practices of power work to construct and control these meanings. Likewise, McGrath (2001) argues that we need to examine more deeply how social practices and relations mediate “the nature and meaning of young people’s

experiences at critical junctures in their lives” and “impact on young people’s capacity to draw on ‘resources’” (p. 482). With these concerns in mind, the process-focussed and contextualized approach I take in the current study acknowledges the broader socio-political influences and structural aspects that help to shape rural communities, as well as the “individual contextual dimensions and frames of thought that integrate the processes and relations surrounding young people” (Trommsdorff, 2000, p. 118).

2.3 RURAL RESTRUCTURING AND ATLANTIC CANADA

Rural restructuring involves a complex interplay between social, economic, political and cultural transitions that researchers attribute to globalization, economic collapse, modernization, the erosion of public-sector support, shifts in domestic rural policies, and urban-centric development (Fairbairn, 1998; Markey, Halseth, & Manson, 2008; Randall & Ironside, 1996; Southcott, 2013). Canada's rural communities have always experienced certain economic ebbs and flows (Parkins & Reed, 2013); however, researchers argue that the aforementioned macro-level forces are rapidly and fundamentally changing livelihoods, social relations, power dynamics, and community structures in rural locations across Canada (Fairbairn, 1998; Markey et al., 2008; Marshall, 2001; Parkins & Reed, 2013).

The defining characteristics of rural restructuring include: shifts in the employment structures and opportunities, which generally means the disintegration of employment in the primary sectors, such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry (Apedaile, Bollman, Reimer, & Stabler, 1993; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Marshall, 2001; Randall & Ironside, 1996; Troughton, 1999); the increasing out-migration of young people (Dupuy et al., 2000; Malatest & Associates, 2002); growing educational and occupational mobility (Malatest & Associates, 2002; McGrath, 2001; Stockdale, 2006); changing demographic patterns, such as an aging and diminishing rural populace (Hanavan & Cameron, 2012; Halseth & Ryser, 2006; Ryser, Manson, & Halseth, 2013); changes related to transportation, technological and communication systems (Green & Meyer, 1997; Laegran, 2002); the onset of new consumption patterns (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; McGrath, 2001); and adaptations to sites and resources for identity production (Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Laegran, 2002). As discussed in the Introduction chapter, the features of rural restructuring resonate within the Hants County context.

Until the mid-20th century, the economies of most rural communities were based on natural resource extraction, and the production of goods and services needed to support those industries (Apedaile et al., 1993; Randall & Ironside, 1996). Rural areas were used primarily as “resource banks,” (Markey et al., 2008, p.409). Primary-sector commodities were grown or extracted to bolster regional economies and fund provincial infrastructure and services (Fairbairn, 1998; Markey et al., 2008). Of course, rural areas also played a role in housing other economic ventures, such as work related to manufacturing (Leach, 2013). Rural communities contributed (and still do) significantly to the country’s social, environmental, and economic well-being, and the Canadian government was focussed on improving the health and welfare programs, infrastructure, railroads, utilities and telecommunications in rural communities (Fairbairn, 1998). The government put agricultural development programs in place, supported agricultural prices and products, and facilitated agricultural adjustments (Fairbairn, 1998; Markey et al., 2008).

By the 1980s, pressures from global forces coincided with shifts in federal agricultural, fishing and forestry policies, which consequently produced “pervasive, fundamental and rapid socio-economic change” (Fairbairn, 1998, p.2) within Canada’s rural communities. Internationally, New European Union programs, like the Common Agricultural Policy, resulted in the closing of traditional markets for Canadian exports (Fairbairn, 1998), while the deconstruction of trade barriers led to heightened competition for Canada in selling its products both at home and internationally. This long-term structural evolution dramatically reshaped the nature of production and manufacturing processes. Global markets became increasingly integrated, facilitating greater mobility of products, people, information and money across international borders (Apedaile et al., 1993; Glasmeier, 1993). With fewer restrictions, firms

could relocate around the world in search of lower-cost labour forces and taxes. These flexible manufacturing processes and trade options heightened global competition, thereby requiring producers to create better products at faster and cheaper rates (Fairbairn, 1998). To compete internationally, the Canadian government implemented incentives to increase production, which caused a boon within certain rural areas (Parkins & Reed, 2013). Increased production, however, required larger companies using more mechanized means for farming, fishing and forestry (Scott & Colman, 2008; Charles, Burbidge, Boyd, & Lavers, 2009). As companies consolidated, the escalated use of technologies meant a smaller labour force could be utilized. The outcomes of these policy shifts were paradoxical: In a governmental attempt to support increased production to ensure the viability of the agricultural and resource sectors, unemployment rates grew in rural areas, as did the out-migration of young people (Hanavan & Cameron, 2012; Fairbairn, 1998).

The disruptions experienced in rural Nova Scotia during this time were certainly far from uniform or of equal impact across locations (Corbett, 2005), but the communities where residents were primarily reliant on fishing, forestry, farming and extraction endured major changes. The shifts were not simply markers of short-term trends; rather, they were indicators of a long-term economic trend of downward returns that called into question the future of family-based and localized systems of agricultural, forestry, and fishing. In 2008, Genuine Progress Index (GPI) Atlantic (see Scott & Colman, 2008) cautioned that Nova Scotia's agricultural communities were "in a state of serious crisis" (p. iii). Their research found that between 1971 and 2007, net farm income in Nova Scotia dropped by an average of 91%. Farms increasingly reported negative farm income, where expenses surpassed income, with expense to income ratios increasing from an average of 82% in the 1970s to 97% between 1997 and 2007. GPI Atlantic's reports on the viability of Nova Scotia's fishing (Charles et al., 2009) and forestry industries (PannoZZo &

Colman, 2008) were no less dire. Unsustainable harvesting methods and an emphasis on growth (rather than sustainability) (Charles et al., 2009; Pannozzo & Colman, 2008), had already produced lasting harm to the natural environment and dramatically damaged the economic base of many rural areas. Family-based models gave way to large companies, and new technologies and mechanization resulted in fewer jobs and higher machine repair costs (Hanavan & Cameron, 2012; Pannozzo & Colman, 2008). Global trade agreements, commodity market pricing, and increased consumer demand for cheaper products, caused the cost of product development to rise above the prices farmers, foresters or fishers could receive in Nova Scotia (Charles et al., 2009; Hanavan & Cameron, 2012; Pannozzo & Colman, 2008; Scott & Colman, 2008). These factors are continuing to impact upon rural areas, and contribute to the complex challenges faced by young people who decide to remain in or return to their rural communities.

Parkins and Reed (2013) argue that the social change currently occurring within rural communities is much more than just economic; it reveals “a political project and is deeply imbued with power, privilege, and challenge” (p. 7). This sentiment is shared by Markey and his colleagues (2008), who call the Canadian government’s 1980s stance toward development and planning for rural areas a withdrawal approach. They describe how the government continued to exploit rural areas for their resources even while offloading responsibility for essential community and infrastructure services. For example, transfer payments and community services - such as road maintenance, post offices, and schools - originally put in place to promote equity in services between rural and urban locations were closed, or local areas were forced to take on the responsibility and expense themselves. The authors state that rural areas continue to deal with the adverse effects of restructuring and argue for renewed, place-based development policies that are relevant to rural areas.

But change is not just happening *to* rural communities. There is a growing literature that shows that youth and their communities are not merely victims of processes of restructuring that range from local to global scale (Leach, 2013). True, youth may be responding to exogenous forces imposed upon their communities (Marshall, 2001), but they are also important actors who collectively shape the social dynamics occurring within their communities (Ryser et al., 2013). The socioeconomic and other alterations experienced and expressed within rural communities can also open up opportunities for personal and collective agency to “construct new narratives, break moulds, and reconstruct ways of understanding and relating to each other and the broader world” (Parkins & Reed, 2013, p. 6).

The many risks that rural transitions can directly and indirectly produce for youth, their families and their communities have been well documented in the literature. These are reviewed in detail in section 2.4 below.

2.4 A REVIEW OF THE RISKS FOR YOUTH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

I have detailed at length the ways in which global forces, economic collapse, and urban-centric policies, among other issues, have dramatically affected rural economies and communities. An evaluation of the literature reveals how the challenges associated with rural transformations may affect the lives of youth and jeopardize their positive psychosocial development.

Higher levels of poverty, stress, and health-related problems are exhibited in rural communities compared to urban settings (Jacob, Bourke & Luloff, 1997; Mitra & Bollman, 2003; Senate Standing Committee Report, 2006). Youth are particularly vulnerable to these challenges, which leave them at risk for problems like substance abuse (Senate Standing Committee Report, 2006), depression, anxiety, suicide and teenage pregnancy (Quine et al., 2003). Because they are less likely to have access to services, recreational facilities (Oncescu & Robertson, 2010; Walia & Liepert, 2012), adequate public transportation systems, and employment or educational options, rural youth are vulnerable to isolation and social exclusion (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; McGrath, 2001; Trelle, van Hoven, & Huigen, 2012; Valentine et al., 2008).

Youth in rural areas are more likely to be faced with poorly diversified economies, work and training options (Dupuy et al., 2000; Hektner, 1995; Marshall, 2002; McGrath, 2001; Stockdale, 2006), and fewer educational opportunities than their urban counterparts (Corbett, 2005; Hektner, 1995). In McGrath's (2001) study, rural participants reported feeling dissatisfied with their work experiences due to low pay, challenging work conditions, seasonal shifts in the opportunities available, and the exploitive practices of employers. Rural youth may perceive themselves as having fewer options (Looker & Naylor, 2009; McGrath, 2001), see their desires

for educational attainment as unrealistic, and blame themselves for not gaining higher educational credentials despite the many structural barriers they need to cross (Looker & Naylor, 2009). Using data from longitudinal surveys in British Columbia and Nova Scotia, Andres and Looker (2001) found that compared to urban youth, rural students had both lower educational expectations and lower attainments, even when parental background, academic stream and gender variables were controlled. The authors indicated that social, cultural and economic forces make it more difficult for rural youth to gain access to educational structures.

According to Corbett (2005), the educational systems currently in place in rural areas “continue to serve their traditional role of sorting and selecting for out-migration” (p. 67). There are fewer employment positions in rural areas that require a higher education, and so youth who invest in their education may see little financial return if they continue to live and work rurally (Corbett, 2005; McGrath, 2001; Shepard, 2004). Corbett (2005, 2007a) coined the term “migration imperative,” to describe the moral responsibility rural youth feel with regards to *needing* to leave their rural homes if they want to be successful. He says that in the same breath youth are told that they need an education and that there is nothing for them if they stay in their rural community.

Indeed, the decision of whether to stay or leave their rural homes is a defining personal conflict in the lives of many rural youth (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Glendinning, Nuttal, Hendry, Kloep, & Wood, 2003; Hektner, 1995). At this age (18 to 23 years), youth may be thinking about their future educational, career and residential plans (McGrath, 2001). They may be highly alert once high school ends to the social and developmental expectations that they should either continue their education or find a job, but the immediate local context does not readily support either of these aspirations. According to McGrath (2001), hurdles encountered

that disrupt contextually relevant phases of the life-course can produce considerable pressures for youth. Thus, the age-range between 18 to 23 becomes a vital juncture in youths' lives, and perhaps more pointedly so in a rural area. Their decisions at this point set the stage for their future challenges, successes and life trajectories.

Research conducted by Hektner (1995) shows that rural adolescents frequently feel conflicted between their aspirations for upward socioeconomic and occupational mobility and their desire to stay living in their rural communities, primarily because of attachments to supportive figures. The findings from 91 questionnaires administered to students in grades 8, 10 and 12 reveal that regardless of the decision made by the adolescents, it is not without emotional costs. Males who felt conflicted about where they hoped to live were found to especially express feelings of anger and emptiness about their futures. When confronted with choosing between two seemingly incompatible paths, some of the participants in Hektner's study indicated they would lower their educational and career aspirations in order to remain close to home.

Perhaps one of the most significant threats to youth wellbeing in rural areas is the *perception* of rural decline. Investigators like Corbett (2007b), Looker and Naylor (2009), and Stenbacka (2011), argue that dominant discourses in a risk-based society (Beck, 1992), relate success with modernity, consumption, individualistic lifestyles, and choice. Discourses of occupational and social achievement in a contemporary and globalized society endorse a mobile, rootless, and individualized workforce. Individuals' connections to place or home are considered only temporary as successful young people "disembed" (Giddens, 1991) from their local attachments and move across a range of market environments. Against this backdrop, youth who chose to, or have limited choice but to, stay living rurally, are consequently implicated as

backward, stagnant and unsuccessful (Bye, 2009; Corbett, 2006; 2007b; Looker & Naylor, 2009; Stenbacka, 2011).

Looker and Naylor (2009) argue that these discourses are internalized by rural youth, who perceive their decision to stay in their home communities as having personally failed to aspire to more. In other words, they embody their rurality as a deficit. The authors conducted an analysis of a longitudinal study that used surveys and interviews in urban Ontario, and rural and urban Nova Scotia. Their analysis focussed on youths' migration decisions and the impacts of these choices over the course of 11 years. The initial survey was taken with 17-year-old youth ($N=1,209$, with approximately 400 respondents at each site), again five years later (400 of whom were also interviewed), and in-depth interviews with 28 selected participants were conducted six years later when they were aged 29. They found that even though rural youth expressed satisfaction in their personal and family realms, and despite seeing family as of core importance for them, many interpreted their socioeconomic problems as their own fault. Youth in the study who had remained living rurally 11 years after the first wave of data collection, were much less likely to have a full-time job in the week preceding the survey than were those in any other group. They reported lower satisfaction with their educational and occupational attainments than the youth who had moved to a city. The authors suggested that because dominant discourses in a contemporary society presume that youth have more choice and agency in the decisions that affect their lives than in previous eras, youth interpret their perceived failure to "get very far" as their fault.

The new opportunities available to young people in an increasingly globalized world are not equally distributed across age, social religion, race, gender (Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Schoon, 2006) or location (Corbett, 2007b). New meanings and subjectivities are "forged in

relation to continuities with older patterns around class and gender” (Wyn & Woodman, 2007, p. 380) as “structures of inequality persist across time” (Wyn & Woodman, 2007, p.376). Thus, as Looker and Naylor’s (2009) work suggests, “many rural youth remain embedded in their home or similar communities, struggling with the challenges of being rural: seasonal work, little access to public transportation, limited formal support structures, and restricted educational and training opportunities” (p. 43). The risk for youth is a sense of rurality that is “powerfully associated with the past, with place ... with stagnation, and with a kind of vague shame” (Corbett, 2006, p. 295).

The perception of rural decline and stagnation also detrimentally affects the policies developed and implemented *on* rural areas (Corbett, 2006; Fairbairn, 1998; Stenbacka, 2011). Fairbairn (1998) asserts that as more people leave their rural areas and the size of rural communities plummet, so too do the number of voices that can vote for vital (and contextually appropriate) rural services and policies. He states, “the *perception* of rural decline has quite likely led many urban people, and many government officials, to regard rural problems as marginal: questions of adjustment, that will go away in time” (p. 2, *emphasis in original*).

Despite the many socio-economic and other obstacles facing young people in rural areas such as Shore Central Hants County, some youth manage to maintain their psychological, social, cultural and collective wellbeing, all the while negotiating for the resources necessary for their positive development. Though youth development and socio-economic change have traditionally been studied as separate disciplines (Trommsdorff, 2000), the current study may help us bridge these disciplinary gaps because it has at its basis the exploration of the impacts of risk (such as those imposed by rural restructuring) on youth development, and how youth strive toward resilience despite pivotal contextual and personal transformations. In the next section, I explore the construct of resilience. I highlight key conceptual issues illustrated in the literature

that are foundational to understanding how processes of successful adjustment unfold in difficult and transitioning times. I do so in order to establish a historical context for the ways I theoretically and methodologically situate my exploration of positive adaptation for young people in rural Hants County, discussed in Chapter 3.

2.5 RESILIENCE

The construct of resilience refers to the relationship between two critical conditions, which are: 1) that the individual has been exposed to adversity significant enough to disrupt their positive development and 2) that they have maintained and achieved positive adaptation despite these risks (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2006; Yates, Egeland, & Sroufe, 2003). Recently, researchers have argued for a more comprehensive understanding of resilience that moves beyond subject-centered approaches to highlight the key role social and physical ecologies play in positive developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Dawes & Donald, 2000; Sameroff, 2009; Ungar, 2011). As established above, young people in rural areas are exposed to a number of threats to their positive development, and yet many are able to sustain and even enhance their psychological and social wellbeing. The study of resilience can help identify which conditions, factors and processes help youth not only cope with the hardships they face, but that enable them to thrive when they remain living in their rural communities.

2.5.1 The Evolution of Resilience Research

Early resilience research focussed on the individual characteristics and personality traits that allowed children to cope with stress. Anthony and Cohler (1987), for example, spoke about the invulnerable child who displayed an ego resilience that insulated them from extreme stress. They suggested that vulnerable children could, through a combination of intrinsic personality characteristics, social support and the use of appropriate coping styles, become somewhat ‘non-vulnerable.’ Researchers subsequently studied pathologies and identified which protective factors helped mitigate the negative impacts of risk (see Luthar, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1992). Over time, the field has changed from a focus on individual resilience to more contextual factors.

An early pioneer in this respect was Garmezy, who, according to Rutter (2012), rejected the notion of invulnerability as proposed by Anthony and Cohler (1987). Garmezy instead insisted that risk and protective influences “needed to be investigated systematically in order to understand how they actually operated in the samples under study. Moreover, it should not necessarily be expected that a universal answer would be found; effects were likely to be shaped by social context” (Rutter, 2012, p. 335).

Recently, resilience researchers have begun to explore the interrelationship between people and their social contexts more extensively. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and others following (See Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Dawes & Donald, 2000; Didkowsky & Ungar, 2010; Sameroff, 2009), suggested use of an ecological, or development-in-context, approach to conceptualize the development of an individual as formed by multiple, interactive and bi-directional transactions between genetic, biological, psychological, and socio-cultural processes. They argued that transactional processes occur within nested micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems including the individual, family, community, and socio-political ecologies of the child (Dawes & Donald, 2000). More distal systems (such as broader socio-cultural values) are mediated by the closer (or proximal) systems (such as the family). The meso-system connects the different micro-systems within which the child operates. For example, a child experiencing dysfunction within her family or community context may receive support from a neighbour, who helps protect the child from further exposure to violence or neglect (Elder & Conger, 2000). Exo-systems are those in which the child is not directly involved, but which can still impact the child’s wellbeing. The child’s parent’s employment status, for example, may result in a more or less stressful home environment (Conger, Rueter & Conger, 2000). According to Ungar (2011), the effort to better understand youth resilience processes using an ecological perspective,

emphasizes the nature of children's social and physical ecologies first, attends to interactional processes between the environment and the child second, and thirdly accounts for the child-specific strengths. Ungar (2008) provides this definition:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their well being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways (p.225).

Viewed in this way, resilience is more than personal traits or assets; it is dynamic and interactive (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Powell, 2003; Rutter, 2006), both an outcome and a transactional process (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001; Sameroff, 2009), and shaped by complex interactions between young people and their social environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cameron, Ungar, & Liebenberg, 2007; Luthar & Bidwell Zelazo, 2003; Sameroff, 2009; Theron, Cameron, Didkowsky, Lau, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2011; Ungar, 2013a).

2.5.2 Conceptual Issues Foundational to the Study of Youth Resilience

For scholars within the youth resilience and development fields, debate ensues regarding how youth resilience emerges within human systems of development, and whether resilience processes differentiate from normative development. Masten (2001) states that resilience processes and outcomes manifest from “the operation of basic human adaptational systems” (p. 227). She says, “Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities” (Masten, 2001, p. 235). Masten's

work with Powell (2003), like that of Yates and her colleagues (2003), suggests that resilience is a process involving hierarchical, integrative, and transactional adaptations in response to both normative and non-normative challenges over the course of development. Successful negotiation of stage or age-salient developmental challenges through use of both internal resources (i.e., flexible coping strategies) and external resources (i.e., support from caregivers) is said to emerge in patterns of competence. As competence develops, the child can adaptively utilize their complex and flexible resource-bank to address developmental challenges. “Competence in one developmental period provides the child with a foundation that enables successful encounters with subsequent age-salient issues” (Yates et al., 2003, p. 247). The individual can consequently strengthen their resistance to future adversities, called a “steeling” effect (Rutter, 2006; 2012).

Though the processes engaged in building resilience may intersect with those of normative youth development, they nonetheless reflect different phenomena. The study of resilience investigates positive adjustment or processes of adaptation *within or despite conditions of risk*, whereas the study of positive or normal development does not make this latter provision (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2006; Ungar & Lerner, 2008). In other words, the resilience construct necessarily includes dimensions of both risk and adaptation, which allows researchers to consequently explore differing and complex correlations between risk, protective factors, and associated outcomes (Schoon, 2006).

Just as resilience and positive development frameworks share much in common, so too do risk and resilience paradigms. Researchers who study resilience and those who study risk are similarly interested in clarifying what factors and processes mould youths’ development in burdened circumstances and both acknowledge the impact of environmental influences on youths’ development (Luthar & Bidwell Zelazo, 2003). The most significant difference between

the two is that resilience research takes a positive, strengths-based approach, whereas risk research uses a problem-focussed lens to study human development in perilous situations. Rutter (2006) asks of the difference between risk and resilience paradigms: “...is resilience just a fancy way of reinventing concepts of risk and protection?” (p.3). He answers:

It is not, because risk and protection both start with a focus on variables, and then move to outcomes, with an implicit assumption that the impact of risk and protective factors will be broadly similar in everyone, and that the outcomes will depend on the mix and balance between risk and protective influences. By contrast, resilience starts with a recognition of huge individual variation in people’s responses to the same experiences, and considers outcomes with the assumption that an understanding of the mechanisms underlying that variation with cast light on the causal processes and, by doing so, will have implications for intervention strategies with respect to both prevention and treatment (Rutter, 2006, p. 3).

Ungar (2011; 2013a) argues that the variability between what constitutes protective or vulnerability factors, or resilience-promoting or reliance-impeding processes, depends upon the interrelationships and “fit” between varying persons and their ecologies, specific risk circumstances, cultures and contexts. Ungar (2011) states that the contextual and cultural ambiguity of the nascent construct of resilience can be accounted for by attending to four key principles: decentrality; complexity; atypicality; and cultural relativity. He suggests that: 1) We need to place greater emphasis on the ecologies within which the child develops, and how well those ecologies facilitate resilience, rather than primarily on the individual characteristics of the child (decentrality); 2) “Resilience-promoting processes only *seem* to produce predictable outcomes. In fact, the likelihood of good outcomes depends on the degree of threat posed by a

changing environment” (Ungar, 2011, p. 7, *emphasis in original*) (complexity); 3) Children may not respond to risky environments in ways that we expect or culturally condone, but non-normative ways of coping (termed “hidden resilience” by Ungar) may still be functional and adaptive (atypicality); and 4) Resilience is a complex construct with varied outcomes, involving processes of navigation and negotiation. Youth navigate toward culturally relevant health-promoting resources, and negotiate - often with cultural elites and dominant discourses - for recognition of, and accessibility to, culturally meaningful strategies, resources and social structures (cultural relativity). What constitutes effective protective and promotive factors depends upon both the quality of the risk factors a young person experiences and the cultural context in which the youth lives (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2006; Sameroff, 2010; Trommsdorf, 2000).

Youth are not just acted upon by their situations, but are active agents in their own lives and play an instrumental role in interpreting and constructing their own experiences. Increasingly, resilience researchers are attending to the meanings youth attribute to their experiences of risk and resilience. As Sanders and Munford (2009) explain, “Issues of voice and inclusion have profound epistemological implications because they cut to the heart of our beliefs about how knowledge is created and whose interests it serves” (p. 79).

It is within this methodological and theoretical evolution that the current study of youth resilience in rural environments is situated. It seeks to understand and honor the perspectives of the youth involved in the study (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; Sanders & Munford, 2009), to better understand how rural youth resilience unfolds in times of transition. Moreover, this study aims to advance the study of resilience by embracing the conceptual shift toward understanding resilience as contextually and culturally-embedded (Cameron et al., 2007; Liebenberg & Ungar,

2009; Theron et al., 2011a; Ungar, 2013a). The methods and theoretical approach I use are described in detail in the Methodology Chapter (Chapter 3).

2.6 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUCCESSFUL ADJUSTMENT FOR RURAL YOUTH IN TRANSITION

In this section I review the protective factors and processes discussed in the literature that enable young people living within strained or restructuring rural communities to cope successfully with their adversities. To begin, I explain how individual, historical and contextual factors may serve to moderate the effects of the socio-cultural, economic and environmental modifications associated with macro-structural trends on the development of youth in general. I then explore the protective factors related to resilience in rural contexts that fall within the four, previously mentioned, mutually interdependent, ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that significantly influence youth development: the individual; the family; the community; and the socio-political context.

2.6.1 Individual, Historical and Contextual Conditions

Individual characteristics and conditions: Although changes in demographic, economic, technological and institutional structures across family, community and socio-political ecologies will alter social conditions, belief systems and identity processes (Mortimer & Larson, 2002), opportunities and barriers to successful adjustment are not equally distributed across age, social religion, ethnicity or gender (Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Wyn & Woodman, 2007). Background factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and family economic status leave some groups of youth with more or less power to take constructive measures in the face of change (Mortimer & Larson, 2002), thereby reinforcing the likelihood of further risks posed to these young people. Patterns of inequality may carry forward even into new regimes, influencing who may take control of adaptive resources, and consequently reinforcing the likelihood of further risk posed to certain young people (Mortimer & Larson, 2002; Wyn & Woodman, 2007). Mortimer and Larson

(2002) state that, “What remains to be emphasized is the ways in which differences in family wealth, and other inequalities affecting access to resources, influence the paths young people take. Shaped within the competitive ethos of post-industrial capitalism, the new adolescence is a period of high stakes in which access to resources is critical in shaping both options and constraints” (p.12).

Age and timing also play an important role in how unrest is reconciled for youth (Garbarino, 2001; Sameroff, 2010; Trommsdorff, 2000). Depending on what stage a person is in their development, and the developmental expectations placed upon them, experiences of social change may produce differential impacts. For example, a strained economic context will more directly affect young people entering the work force, whereas changes in the nature of work security will more likely impact young children at the meso-systemic level through their experiences with their guardians (Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Trommsdorff (2000) explains that both normative developmental transitions and non-normative events in a youth’s life during times of social change will be more likely to be experienced as challenging.

Historical and contextual conditions: Elder (1998) argues that as historical forces shape lives, they also alter social trajectories, like family, education, and work, consequently influencing behaviour and pathways of development. Youth development is molded by the historical features of period (Dawes & Donald, 2000), so that children born in different cohorts, even as little as ten years apart, experience disruptions and social dislocations differently (Elder 1998). Historical contexts hold particular social and political values and understandings, and changes in values produce different possibilities and realities for various groups of young people (Wyn & Woodman, 2007). A poignant example of how individual, historical and contextual conditions play a role in youths’ varying paths to resilience comes from Corbett (2005). His

study investigating the links between formal education and out-migration in a Nova Scotian coastal community included an analysis of spaces identified as important by different populations of different generations as they were coming of age. He demonstrated that youth are presented with very different sets of life choices and institutional expectations depending upon the stages of development in the community's social and economic history. His work showed how changes in fishery policies in the 1980s left some families holding fishing licenses, which better positioned them for coastal work opportunities. Today, those young people whose families do not hold family fishing licenses - especially young women - face a restructured set of options and opportunities.

2.6.2 Protective Factors at the Individual Level

Children's and youths' individual characteristics are inextricably linked to environmental influences on transactional developmental processes, and thus resilience should not be understood as a person-centered construct, but rather a complex interaction between young people and their social environments (Luthar & Bidwell Zelazo, 2003; Ungar, 2011). Although resilience should be seen as more dependent upon the availability and accessibility of culturally relevant resources than on individual factors (Ungar, 2008; 2013a), the following attributes are associated with youths' positive development during times of contextual transition:

Maintaining a positive attitude: Research suggests that youths' attitudes toward their transitional experiences play a role in how they make meaning from their experiences and how well they acculturate or adjust to their new environments. Maintaining a sense of hope (Marshall, 2002) and having the determination to succeed (Stockdale, 2006) are facets of a positive attitude identified in the rural literature. Youths' positive attitudes toward their rural places may be in part related to their ability to nurture and maintain social connections. Elder and Conger (2000)

showed that rural youths' positive adaptations to rural restructuring were not solely determined by their economic advantage or disadvantage. Instead, they found a strong correlation between family ties, high social capital (that is, having access to strong community social support networks) and youths' positive development.

Self-efficacy: The belief that one has the personal capacity, within supportive conditions, to take control of one's life, as well as a strong sense of self and self-confidence have been shown to be related to the youth's ability to adjust positively when dealing with different types of challenges in rural contexts (Elder & Conger, 2000; Marshall, 2002). In contexts of rural economic and social restructuring, strong links exist between positive self-concept, self-esteem and group identification (Elder & Conger, 2000; Trell et al., 2012).

Subjective beliefs and goals: The formulation of personal goals for education and work despite significant community disruptions have been linked to the positive development of rural youth (Elder & Russell, 2000). According to Marshall (2002), it is important for youth to be future-oriented but realistic about the opportunities and challenges that accompany significant dislocations. Setting goals helps youth to develop strategic planning skills or "planful competence" (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000, p.8; Elder & Russell, 2000).

Strong work-ethic: Being practically-minded (Bye, 2009), feeling competent, having a strong work-ethic, and showing a sense of responsibility toward others (Elder & Conger, 2000; Marshall, 2002) are all factors that have been found to foster the adjustment of youth in rural settings.

2.6.3 Family Systems

The impacts of geographical, political and ideological transformations are often mediated via the proximal environment of the family (Schoon, 2006; Trommsdorff, 2000). Family and kinship relations have been shown to mold young people's experiences of lifestyles, school, peer relationships, future plans, and work (Punch, 2002). In strained economic contexts, the concept of family is often fluid and may include networks of extended family and community relations (Theron et al., 2011a). Families can themselves be sources of stress during times of change, and family economic strain has been shown to increase youth stress during times of restructuring (Conger et al., 2000). But families can also offer emotional support, connection, a sense of belonging and exposure to positive role models (Elder & Conger, 2000). Through extended family ties, youth are provided access to work opportunities and social networks, as well as entrepreneurial pathways supported by parental and extended kinship experience and knowledge (Corbett, 2005). Other family factors associated with resilience for young people in transition include the following:

Family climate: Family trust, emotional closeness, and cohesion play a protective role for youth experiencing transitions. Conger and her colleagues (Conger et al., 2000) found that families experiencing economic strain due to rural restructuring that were still able to resolve family conflicts constructively, were more likely to sustain supportive interactions, resulting in fewer disagreements over time. They found that the support of the husband to the wife resulted in parenting that showed better communication and effective problem solving skills. These parents were more likely to have children with better adaptive capacities.

Filial responsibility and contributions: Youths' contributions to family during times of stress can help foster better psychosocial adjustment (Punch, 2002; Ungar, Theron &

Didkowsky, 2011). Elder and Conger (2000), for example, suggest that children's contributions on family farms during economic downturns can promote a sense of self-worth. Their research with children and families in Iowa found that children who grew up on farms felt a deep sense of responsibility toward their families, were likely to spend time in communal activities, and felt strong feelings of connection and fewer feelings of isolation. Importantly, youth believed that their parents viewed them as vital members of the household.

2.6.4 Community Systems

Youths' relationships with their caregivers profoundly influence their ability to interact with their broader environments and take advantage of the protective resources available to them (Cameron, Ungar & Liebenberg, 2007). Likewise, community contexts directly influence the mental health of those who care for children (Dawes & Donald, 2000), thereby indirectly affecting children's adaptive capacities. There are a number of positive community forces associated with rural youths' adaptive development during times of change and adversity.

Social cohesion and community support: Healthy communities exhibit high social cohesion, engagement, reciprocity, extended support systems between neighbours, and provide communities with the sense of shared belonging (Trell et al., 2012). In a study of wellbeing in rural communities experiencing socioeconomic shifts, Jacob and his colleagues (1997) found that stress levels were slightly lower in communities whose members perceived their neighbourhoods as interactive. Interactional communities were those where members felt other residents were as interested in community issues as they were, and where people felt at home and satisfied with their network of relationships. Likewise, McManus and his colleagues (McManus et al., 2012) interviewed 115 farmers in two rural regions in Australia and found that despite inadequate health care services and the decline of employment opportunities, the farmers perceived their

communities as strong and resilient. They attributed this resilience to the close connection between neighbours, friends and family, and a shared sense of belonging. It also appears that youth with strong emotional ties to their communities are less likely to want to out-migrate (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006).

An interesting example of preserving traditional social support structures and collectivity in response to major rural economic reforms comes from Gambold (2010). Though not specific to youth, her research examined how rural villagers in Russia dealt with reorganization processes in farming following the economic and political restructuring of the former Soviet Union. She found that: “The effects of the post-Soviet economic restructuring and political upheaval forced a renegotiation of the rural individual’s emotional place in the wider national milieu and within the village itself” (Gambold, 2010, p. 281), revealing an emotional economy. In the emotional economy, the value of labour is related to both the potential for earning, but also to whether one’s work benefits social cohesion and the community collective. Instead of shifting completely to neoliberal, privatized, free-market farm systems, villagers demonstrated hybridization of privatization *and* maintenance of collective labour exchange and social support structures. By maintaining culturally accepted forms of social support, villagers preserved traditional sites for emotional integrity and wellbeing, for which there were no forthcoming alternatives from the free-market system.

Collective agency: The expression of rules, power and competition shape the ways in which youth and other community members access opportunities and resources for psychosocial growth, participate meaningfully in mainstream economies, and gain mastery over their lives. Community contexts that support youths’ opportunities to experience power and control are those that allow collective decision-making and foster a collective sense of power among

community members (Ryser et al., 2013). Communities that demonstrate collective agency provide young people opportunities to be socialized into positive subcultures and organizations and encourage youth civic engagement (Ryser et al., 2013) and resilience.

Services, structures and instrumental supports: Institutions, human services and other collective resources help shape the way a community functions. Resilience-promoting communities not only offer good neighbourhood connections and access to services such as hospitals, mental health resources and social supports, but also equitable access to those structures that allow youth to successfully adjust to their changing conditions (Jacob et al., 1997; Mortimer & Larson, 2002). The structural design of community spaces – including housing density, the quality and number of social, physical and mental-health supports in the area, the quality of housing, the kinds and costs of transportation systems, and the quality of recreational facilities and schools, along with the demographics of the community (including the community's ethnic mix, age and gender distributions) impact upon the opportunities young people have for positive psychosocial development (Donald & Dawes, 2000; Halseth & Ryser, 2006; Mortimer & Larson, 2002). Resilience-promoting communities provide education systems that make sense given the local context (Corbett, 2005; Ungar, Russell, & Connelly, 2014), account for students' cultural differences in programming, and encourage teachers who actively engage and advocate for their students (Theron, Liebenberg & Malindi, 2013; Ungar et al., 2014). Strong communities also offer youth access to age-appropriate work and employment opportunities (Mortimer & Larson, 2002; Ryser et al., 2013), conditions that increase the capacity of young people to show resilience in contexts where they may be marginalized.

Youth-adult partnerships, community supports, and mentors: Exposure to at least some well-functioning caregivers, role models, peers or supportive community members can protect

youth against risks in their environments (Cameron et al., 2007). While all youth benefit from adult and community support, youth from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds enjoy the differential positive impact of quality youth-adult engagement (Ungar, 2013b). Ryser and her colleagues (2013) provide evidence that the active engagement of youth in stressful rural climates can help decrease youths' feelings of isolation, and consequently encourage them to improve their behaviours. Through mentoring, experiential learning and deliberate efforts to increase youth participation in the community, youth receive practical work experience and are exposed to previously inaccessible institutional procedures that can increase youths' personal, social, and cultural capitals.

Peers: For young people in strained rural contexts, peer relations can provide a robust support network, sources of information regarding career decisions and a sense of belonging (Marshall, 2002). Positive peer relationships and the development of healthy social identities, are more likely in communities that create spaces for young people to interact in prosocial ways. Positive peer relationships, the development of social identities, and community cohesion are more easily fostered in communities that provide its members access to sports and other recreation facilities (Oncescu & Robertson, 2010; Walia & Liepert, 2012), safe streets with street lamps (Walia & Liepert, 2012), and public transportation (Valentine et al., 2008; Walia & Liepert, 2012).

2.6.5 Socio-political Systems

Studying youth development within rural contexts highlights the ways in which socio-political systems precipitate significant cultural, social and environmental transformations, and influence the relationships between young people, their families and communities. Not only can the policies of nations *cause* significant cultural and contextual alterations for youth, they can

also *moderate* the impact of socio-political forces like migration and rural restructuring on young people. For example, Kerckhoff (2002) found variation in the way economic restructuring has affected young people in different countries. In the United States, high school dropouts have significantly fewer opportunities than college graduates; yet regardless of their educational credentials, young people's first jobs will most likely be part-time, temporary, and on-call employment, promising few benefits or security. In contrast, European countries like Australia, Switzerland and Germany promote a system of apprenticeship that helps young people enter into the workforce earlier and with higher wages. Resilience is, therefore, as dependent on exo-systemic factors like education policies and the minimum wage as it is individual qualities, peer and family relationships and the quality of the community in which a young person lives.

2.7 PROCESSES CENTRAL TO PARTICIPANTS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF RESILIENCE

In the research findings, I document variations in youths' constructions of positive adaptation to the complicated hurdles associated with processes of rural restructuring, as well as the other complex developmental risks they face. I present here three key underlying, interlocking and dynamic categories of processes that together help to shape both youths' perceived impact of their challenges, and the diversity in youths' constructions of, and pathways to, resilience. These mediating processes underpin the substantive theory developed as part of the study and include: 1) meaning-making; 2) bounded agency and power; and 3) constructions of self, space and place. The conceptual deliberations I present in this section arise out of an examination of interdisciplinary literatures related to youth development, resilience, psychology and anthropology, feminist and youth migration studies, and geographical and sociological studies of space and place. Examples from research conducted in diverse settings of social and economic change, including those related to socio-political collapse and forced migration, are also included here, when the authors' analyses are relevant to the current research and help to illuminate discussions within my findings. To reiterate, the theoretical contemplations below represent an integration of the knowledge contributions from these diverse disciplines, as they help to support and frame the research findings.

2.7.1 Meaning-Making

As a conceptual category, meaning-making implies both the cognitive processing and sociocultural frameworks involved in the processes of attending to, interacting with, interpreting, and reacting to adverse situations, as well as the ability to, through these processes, make sense of traumatic experiences and events. An attention to meaning-making illustrates how external

physical events can take on internal psychological significance, thereby impacting future goals, values, expectations and behaviors. These values, goals and expectations, in turn, influence how and what kinds of resources are built out of adverse situations. As posited by Dawes and Donald (2000), whatever influences local environments have on children must be seen as a product of how these environments are perceived and interpreted by children and parents. Generating meaning involves using various frameworks for understanding, or “internal working models” (Trommsdorff, 2000). These meaning-making frameworks “filter the subjective perceptions and evaluation of events, including changes in environment” (Trommsdorff, 2000, p. 65), and depend upon belief systems that are rooted in cultural, spiritual, ethnic, and gendered social expectations, traditions and practices.

The importance of the conceptual category of meaning-making is not only illuminated in *how meaning is made*, but also in recognizing the adaptive outcomes of *finding meaning* following significant transformations (Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003; Walsh, 2007). According to Updegraff, Silver, and Holman (2008), the search for meaning is a primary human motivation that allows individuals to keep hopeful in the face of adverse circumstance. Meaning-making helps contextualize stress and allows the individual to come to terms with “the traumatic experience, putting it in perspective, and weaving the experience of loss and recovery into the fabric of individual and collective identity and life passage” (Walsh, 2007, p. 210). Updegraff and his colleagues (2008) argue, however, that it is not the *search* for meaning that allows people to adjust to social disorder; rather, it is being able to come to terms and *find* meaning in the event. The process of “making sense” or “making meaning” of change seems to include the attempt to maintain a connection with the norms and values of the past that gave purpose to

one's life, whilst using the transitional experience to develop a personal story of resilience (Becker, 1997; Gupta & Ferguson, 1999; Walsh, 2007).

2.7.2 Bounded Agency and Power

Access to power and control is crucial to fostering youth resilience (Prilleltensky et. al., 2001), and yet inadequate attention has been dedicated to better understanding the relationship between social power and successful adjustment for children in transitioning environments (Boyden, 2003). Indeed, as young people develop new capacities they are increasingly able to make decisions that actively shape their environments, their experiences within these environments and thus their personal development (Boyden, 2003; Dawes & Donald, 2000; Evans, 2002; Panelli, 2002). As interdependent actors (Punch, 2002b), youth formulate goals and mold their interpersonal relationships, but their hopes, expectations and actions are bounded by the kinship obligations (Punch, 2002b; Theron, Cameron, Lau, Didkowsky, Mabitsela, 2009), broader systems of power, and modifying macro-structural contexts (Didkowsky & Ungar, 2010) that influence youths' access and availability of culturally significant pathways to resilience (Ungar, 2008; Ungar, 2011). Empowerment, then, can be understood as the union of internal capacities and external conditions that allow young people to take control of their lives (Boyden, 2003; Evans, 2002; Prilleltensky et. al., 2001). Processes of personal agency and social transitions interweave, not always in harmonious ways (Boyden, 2003; 2010), into a series of relationships, discourses, and power struggles to be negotiated by the youth (Punch, 2002b; Shanahan & Hood, 2000).

Foucault's contemplations on power (1980) and the discursive production of the subject (Butler, 1997) speak to power produced and inscribed in various spaces. He says:

People have always reproached me for these spatial obsessions, which have indeed been obsessions for me. But I think through them I did come to what I had basically been looking for: the relations that are possible between power and knowledge. Once knowledge can be analyzed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power (Foucault, 1980, p. 69).

Valentine and her colleagues (2008) point to the power of community surveillance - a topic also of great interest in Foucault's theories of power - in shaping the social spaces (and thus identities) available to youth. Because there are fewer public spaces in rural areas, they are more likely to be contested. They argue that rural youth have fewer opportunities than urban youth to explore possible selves away from the watchful gazes of parents and community members.

Researchers suggest that youth are presented with varying and contested discourses that they need to negotiate in order to construct knowledge and make meaning of their experiences of transition or risk (Panelli, 2002; Punch, 2002b; Ungar, 2008; 2011). These discourses are embedded within wider socio-cultural and historical contexts that involve material, economic, and political dimensions. Ungar (2011; 2012) explains that resilience involves the dual processes of negotiation and navigation that position positive development as a shared experience between the individual and their social and physical ecologies. Youth must first navigate their way toward health resources, like social services, socio-political power structures and nurturing relationships. Once in contact with these health-promoting resources, youth must then undergo a series of negotiations in order to achieve the best fit of support or resilience-nurturance for them given their specific circumstances, cultures and contexts. If the resources provided lack meaning, or youth are unable to navigate to appropriate and necessary resources, the environment has not

provided youth the access, availability or suitability of what they need in order to cope despite significant adversity. This process-oriented and context-sensitive approach to understanding resilience requires appreciation of “the opportunity structure of the environment that shapes which developmental pathways are viable over time” (Ungar, 2011, p. 11).

Though not specific to youth, an example of the ways in which processes of bounded agency/ power entwine to sculpt individuals’ successful adjustment during transitions can be found in Marshall’s (2001) ethnographic research with women from Grand Manan in Eastern Canada. Through the use of interviews, participant observation, fieldwork and involvement in community activities over the course of five years, Marshall learned that the restructuring of the formerly thriving fishing industry produced changes in the community’s economic and family structures. As a result, women’s traditional modes of communication, collective identity formation and relationship building with other women altered dramatically. Traditionally, when the men went to work on the fishing boats, the women of the community would be tasked with stringing and boning herring collectively in the wharf-side sheds, which became significant spaces for developing community relationships, female connectedness, shared experience and identity development. The economic restructuring took away the community’s traditional economic and social bases of community relations, but failed to provide comparable sources for identity continuity. Today, women have taken an active approach renegotiating historic patterns of relationships to find new ways of connecting with other women, although their agency in doing so is bounded by the continuing dominance of patriarchal structures, religious values and familial lineage.

2.7.3 Space, Place and Identity

The cultivation of a positive identity, regardless of how this might be conceptualized across cultures and contexts, can help youth make sense of adversity and displacement (Chen, Lau, Tapanya & Cameron, 2012; Didkowsky & Ungar, 2010). Some developmental theorists (Erikson, 1968) see identity formation as the primary developmental task of adolescence. Crockett and Silbereisen (2000) assert that the “development of a coherent, integrated sense of self is linked to finding one’s niche in a society and acquiring a sense of self as existing through time” (p.7). Post-modern theorists and social constructionists see constructions of self as flexible and multiple, being continually renegotiated and performed depending upon social location, power structures, and cultural scripts (Cerulo, 1997; Gabriel, 2006). In this work, I consider identity as relational and (re)constructed through an interplay between the youth and their experiences within the multiple and interactive ecologies that shape the cultural traditions and narratives youth experience (Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Maegusuku-Hewett, Dunkerley, Scourfield, & Smalley, 2007; Minh-ha, 1994; Mouffe, 1994).

Researchers have begun to look at the multidimensional nature of identity. Jones and McEwen (2000), for example, discuss how multiple identity orientations make up a person’s sense of self. Findings from their grounded theory study with 10 undergraduate women show that there are multiple layers of identities (for example, orientations related to gender, religion, education, geography or professions) and that in certain situations or contexts, one or more identity dimensions may take salience over the others. Identity orientations influence decisions that are personal or professional in nature, guide personal beliefs, and impact future planning. Likewise, Shepard (2004) talks about youths’ constructions of possible selves, which she describes as influenced by youths’ culture, gender, socioeconomic situation and social history.

Possible selves are said to represent aspects of self-knowledge that are sensitive to feed-back from the environment. They form a basis through which past and current experiences are understood, and future goals are developed.

Youth experiencing rural community changes may be placed on the cusp of old and new values, and forced to recast the meanings of previous roles, relationships and understandings (Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Shepard, 2004; Valentine et al., 2008). Contextual transformations can affect identity formation for youth when: change removes many of the previous resources available for youth to identify with (Kraack & Kenway, 2002); past achievements that have been central to youths' identity become irrelevant in a new social system (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000); societal expectations and values shift swiftly (Kraack & Kenway, 2002); and when the interaction between social change, globalization processes and media reveals to youth new sites of cultural and identity production (Laegran, 2002).

Sites for identity developments are produced, bounded, contested and differ depending on youths' ethnicity, gender, and social class (Panelli et al., 2008). In rural Australia, Kraack and Kenway (2002) found that economic restructuring produced changes in local cultural attitudes and ideals around behaviors, lifestyles and expressions of self for youth. The loss of working class modes of employment, paired with a shift toward tourism-focused work opportunities, transformed the community's expectations and perceptions of youth. New community residents actively prevented the "loitering" of young people in former youth-friendly social-spaces, like the beach; places that were once locations for the production and performance of youth identities. This example shows how identity developments and contrasting notions of "community" are entwined with social and economic relationships, which Marshall (2001) informs is especially so in periods of community change.

The relationships between constructions of self, communities, and geographical places are highly complex and interconnected. Places are geographical locations, have material form, and are invested with meaning and value (Gieryn, 2000). People and places dynamically co-create each other (Bhattacharyya et al., 2013): places may be built by people, but they are also “interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined” (p. 465), their meanings malleable and contested. Individuals’ interactions within certain places mould the development of personal and collective identities (Santos & Buzinde, 2007). Gieryn (2000) says that, “Place mediates social life; it is something more than just another independent variable” (p. 467) and Santos and Buzinde (2007) contend that, “In fact, space is fundamental to constructions of *cultural identity* because the affirmation, creation and negotiation of social identities occurs within and through spatial relations of places” (p.322, *emphasis in original*). Personal and social identities are therefore formed in partnership with the meanings communities and their members give to communal places (Silvey, 2004). Indeed, in the current research, the significance of place - whether place be considered geographical or *a sense of place* or a sense of being *displaced*- in the construction of youths’ identities, emerged.

I appreciate the way that Marshall (2001), who is influenced by George Herbert Mead, describes the dialectical process of identity formation:

Central to this discussion about evolving economic and institutional change is an understanding of how personal and collective identities are related to their community contexts ... In his [Mead’s] view, the individual acquires an identity by means of self-formation within a socially interactive framework of adaptation represented by the structure of community norms. This notion emphasises the dynamic nature of identity, and its inherent instability, dependent upon relations of difference. Layers of economic,

social and political relationships within particular contexts of history, migration and mobility create ‘webs of significance’ and life-worlds of meaning that are constantly created and recreated through social interaction (Marshall, 2001, p. 395).

Place identity, or seeing one’s sense of self as inseparable to particular geographical locations, speaks to the shared histories, socially valued sites and practices, and ethnic traditions connected to those localities (Panelli et al., 2008). Panelli and her colleagues’ (2008) research in Bluff, New Zealand, illustrated how the creation of place identities involves representation of partial histories, and that social change impacts upon how these identities are created and represented. They articulated the link between Maori resilience and their identification with Awarua, a significant site representing a collective sense of belonging and place. At the same geographical location, non-indigenous residents described themselves as “Bluffies,” portraying their identity as hinged to the same physical space, though for symbolically different reasons. As this example illustrates, place is much more than about where one dwells; the construction of social spaces shift over time, and are expressed in varying shared cultural practices, social relations, histories, and structures of power (Halfacree, 1993; Sarup, 1994; Williams & McIntyre, 2001). As Williams and McIntyre (2001) argue, people’s strong identification with place reveals an emotional geography.

In times of social change, individuals may construct collective identities that help give meaning to the transitions they are experiencing (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). The narratives do not simply reflect life, but rather are constructions generated in the present to interpret events of the past (Eastmond, 2007; Somers, 1994). Mahalingam (2006) calls these narratives “idealized identities” and insists they play a significant role in creating and sustaining an essentialized sense of community for young people in transition. The knowledge contributions around idealized

identities I mention here come primarily from the migration literatures, but are valuable to the theoretical considerations in the current research. As DeVos and Romanucci-Ross (1975) state, “To know one’s origin is to have not only a sense of prominence, but perhaps more importantly, a sense of continuity in which one finds to some degree the personal and social meaning of human existence” (p. 364). Mahalingam (2006) warns that idealized cultural identities can have dual effects: they can be a source of pride as well as a source of pressure due to high expectations to maintain previous cultural roles in a new location.

This research also attends to the ways in which social processes of difference, inequality and exclusion happen through places (Gieryn, 2000). As argued above, community surveillance in rural social spaces lets residents know there are boundaries of appropriate behavior, and that they are being policed (Foucault, 1980; McGrath, 2001; Silvey, 2004; Valentine et al., 2008;). Society is therefore not objective, but “rather is contingent on social agents who construct and maintain it through *interaction*” (Santos & Buzinde, 2007, p. 323, *emphasis in original*). In the current research, an examination of youths’ experiences of feeling in and out of place in their rural communities illuminates the ways that boundaries of identities are shaped (Silvey, 2004), and how these play a role in youths’ adaptive development in restructuring rural communities.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The investigation of rural youth resilience is of heightened importance as rural contexts increasingly experience the removal of resources and services essential to the social, physical and psychological wellbeing of young people, their families, and their communities. In this chapter I presented the complex causes of rural economic restructuring, and the subsequent consequences for youths' positive development discussed in the literature. I clarified the construct of resilience, and reviewed the resilience literatures relevant to my research. I explored in-depth the value of a contextualized approach that focuses on the interactions between youth and their social and physical ecologies in order to explain successful adjustment for youth experiencing transitions and strain in rural contexts. My aim was to build the basis from which to anchor the theoretical approach and research methods I used to collect and analyze the data. These methodologies are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this research, substantive theory was generated to explain patterns of positive adaptation for young people facing the adverse social, economic and environmental impacts of restructuring in their rural Atlantic Canadian communities. This chapter focuses on the methodologies used to collect, code, and interpret the data. Epistemologically, a social constructionist approach was taken to conceptualize resilience as embedded in culture and context. The methodology included use of a social constructionist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003; 2006; Clarke, 2005; Liebenberg, Didkowsky & Ungar, 2012). Innovative qualitative methods were employed to collect narrative, visual and observational data. They included photo-elicitation, videotaping a *'day in the life'* of participants, field notes, life-space mapping, and in-depth interviews.

To begin, in section 3.2 I describe my theoretical orientation of social constructionism. I provide an analysis of positivism in order to expand upon a social constructionist's approach to studying resilience. Ungar (2004) has argued that a social constructionist discourse on resilience has the strength to inform policy and interventions for youth living in strained environments. I agree and argue that this is because social constructionists are positioned to pay explicit attention to: 1) culturally and contextually-embedded aspects of resilience; 2) the ways in which social structures, socio-political forces, and competing discourses may simultaneously facilitate or impede resilience; and 3) youths' agency in co-constructing their own environments. They can therefore offer policy-makers innovative solutions that fit with youths' lived experiences (Ungar, 2004). I then explain my social constructionist's stance toward constructing theory and using

visual methods, contrasting the approach with positivist interpretations of image and observation-based data.

In section 3.3 I give a brief history of the development of grounded theory, to lay the footing for understanding how social constructionism combined with grounded theory can provide a set of useful guidelines for studying youths' interpretations of risk and resilience.

I explain my use of qualitative methods, focusing more specifically qualitative visual methods in section 3.4. I suggest that if visual methods are engaged reflectively, they can: increase the authenticity of findings; minimize power and language barriers; shift control to the participants; engage youth to recognize individual and community assets; and produce new knowledge and understandings of social phenomena.

In section 3.5, I speak about the research site and participants, as well as review the study design, data collection methods, research sequence and data analysis procedures.

I articulate the methods I used to increase the trustworthiness of my research in section 3.6. I review the tools I used to foster reflection and reciprocity, reflexive, enhance adequacy of the data, and represent participants' diverse standpoints adequately and fairly.

In the final section, 3.7, I reflect on the researcher-participant relationship and highlight some of the practical and ethical issues I faced while conducting the research.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.2.1 A Social Constructionist's Approach to Investigating Youth Resilience

The theoretical framework provides the 'backbone' to research design; it helps shape the types of questions to be posed, and supports the methods and analytical procedures to be employed (Ball & Smith, 1992; Gergen, 2001; Liebenberg, 2009b; Pauwels, 2010; Pink, 2001a; Suchar, 1997). As Ball and Smith (1992) state, "All observation and investigation, lay and analytic, is theory-laden: there are no theory-free views of the world" (p. 3). My own epistemological approach to studying resilience aligns with a social constructionist position because it honours the possibility of multiple ways of knowing, while still having the power to inform the development of transformative policy compatible with the lived experiences of a specific population (Ungar, 2004). A social constructionist discourse on resilience reflects a "postmodern interpretation of the construct and defines resilience as the outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources to define themselves as healthy amidst conditions collectively viewed as adverse" (Ungar, 2004, p. 342). As a social constructionist, I believe that the ways in which young people understand their worlds and interpret their experiences will in turn affect their behaviours. In other words, how young people construct meaning from their encounters will play an active role in shaping their future interactions and thus their own developmental pathways. A social constructionist approach to investigating youth resilience posits that how people make meaning from and engage with their experiences depends upon age, class, and gender (Charmaz, 2006). My own perspective has been significantly shaped by my work with Ungar (2011) and Liebenberg (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009), who argue for a more comprehensive understanding of resilience that emphasizes the relationship between children and youth and their social and physical ecologies. The interactions

engaged by youth within their ecologies are grounded in historical, geographical, temporal, and socio-cultural contexts and understood through mechanisms that are socially mediated (Boyden, 2003; Sameroff, 2010).

A social constructionist view challenges positivist paradigms that are underscored by the modernist tradition and that tend to overemphasize predictable relationships between risk, protective resources and resilience, regardless of cultural context (Ungar, 2004; 2008). Positivists contend that empirical and universal truths can be uncovered by the systematic study and documentation of social phenomenon via research processes that herald objectivity and that work to eliminate subjectivity and researcher-bias (Gergen, 2001; Morawski, 2001; Stanczak, 2007; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). It is presumed that if variables can be controlled, objective neutrality can exist and predetermined (*a priori*) outcomes can be determined (Kovach, 2010). Researchers investigating resilience in diverse contexts, however, increasingly elucidate the complex and varying ways different populations show positive adaptation in response to significant risk (Didkowsky, Ungar, & Liebenberg, 2010; Rutter, 2006; Theron et al., 2011a). Without caution, researchers face the pitfall of determining ideals for appropriate responses based on underlying perceptions from the researcher's own background (Didkowsky et al., 2010; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2006; Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009; Punch, 2002a). Ungar (2004) states that for these reasons, positivist research has had trouble “measuring resilience in different contexts, problems discerning valid definitions of positive outcomes, and difficulty developing effective interventions which are congruent with the experiences of marginalized populations” (p. 343). These obstacles have left the resilience construct open to criticism that it is nothing more than a tautology (Ungar, 2004).

An interpretivist or social constructionist standpoint, in contrast, reflects a postmodern perspective that rejects the possibility of a neutral or unbiased position, actively acknowledges the influence of the researcher-participant relationship on the data collected, and includes these interactions and subjectivities into the research process and analysis (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Clarke (2005) states:

If modernism emphasized universality, generalization, simplification, permanence, stability, wholeness, rationality, regularity, homogeneity, and sufficiency, then postmodernism has shifted emphasis to partialities, positionalities, complications, tenuousness, instabilities, irregularities, contradictions, heterogeneities, situatedness, and fragmentation – complexities (p. xxiv).

A social constructionist stance tolerates plurality, chaos, flexibility, and relativity in the way resilience is understood and fostered (Clarke, 2005; Ungar, 2004; 2011). It analyzes “situatedness” (Clarke, 2005) and resides *in situ* (Cameron, Lau, & Tapanya, 2009; Gillen & Cameron, 2010; Gillen et al., 2006), examining the broader social structures and cultural contexts of youths’ lives, *and* the meaning they make from their experiences within these environments. Research that better acknowledges and accounts for cultural and contextual variability may subsequently lead to less arbitrary conceptions of resilience (Ungar, 2011). Moreover, when we try to understand resilience from the perspectives of youth whose voices have not been well-documented – as is the case in the current study – we open the possibility of uncovering previously unrecognized aspects of resilience.

A social constructionist orientation to investigating resilience is also sensitive to the “power-knowledge complex” (Hook, 2001, p. 6). It can offer a “critical deconstruction of the power different health discourses carry” (Ungar, 2004, p. 345), recognizing that “discourse itself

is both constituted by, and ensures the reproduction of, the social system, through forms of selection, exclusion and domination” (Hook, 2001, p. 2-3). Foucault’s conjectures on power and the discursive production of the subject (Butler, 1997) are pertinent to my doctoral study because they push the researcher to contemplate the ways in which discourses are negotiated between youth and their interactants; how identities and subjectivities are constructed; and how knowledge and power are produced (Clarke, 2005). These knowledges are situated (Haraway, 1988), made persuasive through the power of varying linguistic and other discursive practices (Gergen, 2001; Hook, 2001), and are “produced and consumed by particular groups of people, historically and geographically locatable” (Clarke, 2005 p. xxv).

Importantly, a social constructionist discourse on resilience has the power to inform policy and interventions for youth living in difficult environments. The explicit attention to 1) culturally and contextually-embedded aspects of resilience, 2) the ways in which social structures, socio-political forces, and competing discourses may simultaneously facilitate or impede resilience, and 3) youths’ agency in co-constructing their own environments, can offer policy makers innovative solutions that fit with youths’ lived experiences, strengths and needs (Ungar, 2004). Policies and programs that are congruent with youths’ experiences and constructions of resilience are more likely to enhance the adaptive capacities of youth and more likely to be adopted by youth, their families and their communities (Boyden, 2003; Ungar, 2004).

3.2.2 A Social Constructionist’s Approach to Theorizing the Visual and Using Visual

Methods

The researcher’s choice of method reflects epistemological views and vice-versa (Rabinowitz & Weseen, 2001). Researcher-created data and explanations of social phenomenon that foreground researcher expertise over participants’ lived experiences are considered more

representative of positivism, while research that focuses on the subjective meanings attributed to social phenomena by participants, is considered more akin to interpretivist and constructionist principles (Harper, 1989; Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Stanczak, 2007).

My theoretical grounding of social constructionism orients me toward reflexive and interpretive methods for understanding visual data. However, researchers first using the camera for investigative purposes were more likely to associate themselves with positivist ideas and philosophies (Stanczak, 2007). This was due to the belief that because the camera operates by a mechanical process, it permits “the rapid and faithful recording of visual phenomenon” (Ball & Smith, 1992, p. 4) and in doing so there was “one important sense in which the camera cannot lie” (Ball & Smith, 1992, p. 6). The camera was likened to “a mirror with a memory” (Ball & Smith, 1992, p. 16), allowing researchers access to an objective “window on the world.” This view has been widely challenged by theorists who insist that images are not unmediated renderings (Prosser & Loxley, 2008), but rather are constructions rooted in culturally and historically significant contexts (Becker, 1998; Hancock, Gillen & Pinto, 2010; Harrison, 2002; Jenks, 1995; Martin & Martin, 2004; Pauwels, 2010; Pole, 2004; Prosser & Loxley, 2008).

The theoretical structures along which we align our research agendas have the effect of directing our “ways of seeing,” and our “1) assumptions concerning the finite and visible character of social phenomenon, 2) assumptions concerning clear sightedness, that is the moral and political disposition of the theorist, and 3) assumptions concerning the manner of “visual” relationship that sustains between the theorist and his/ her phenomena” (Jenks, 1995, p. 5). Fieldwork engages several of the researcher’s senses, including vision, as the use of the term *observation* makes clear (Ball & Smith, 1992). Jenks (1995) argues, however, that the term *observation* carries with it ontological and epistemological baggage, because over time the terms

‘seeing’ and ‘observation’ have become conflated with definitions of ‘cognition’ and ‘objective truth.’

Harper (2003) expresses this underlying tension between notions of observation versus objectivity in explaining his own work using visual images: “Although these images produce what I consider to be empirical data, I do not claim that these images represent ‘objective truth’” ... “The very act of observing is interpretative, for to observe is to choose a point of view” (p. 183). Likewise, Rabinowitz and Weseen (2001) suggest that “...if one’s definition of science includes dispassionate, disinterested, unbiased observation, then practically no research on either side is scientific, because description is always evaluative and always comes from a particular point of view, with a particular purpose in mind” (p. 17).

If description is always evaluative, as Rabinowitz and Weseen (2001) propose, then the researcher must remain acutely aware of the profound sociological statements they make as a result of their images and explanations (Harper, 2003). In both the creation and selection processes investigators are in a position of power to decide which images (or any data, for that matter) become privileged and worthy of enquiry (Daniels, 2006; Prosser, 2000), and thus without reflection researchers can unintentionally “reproduce structures of hierarchy and domination already embedded in our visual world” (Krieger, 1979, p. 249; Liebenberg, 2009a; Liebenberg, 2009b). As Jenks (1995) eloquently states:

Selection is often made real and legitimated by the methodologies of collection. That is, within the languages of social and cultural theory we have ways of capturing, gathering or collecting our world. We do this through schemes of classification, though our sorting procedures, and through the generation and application of our categories of analysis. Such processes should only be interpreted as ‘blinkering,’ ‘distorting,’ or ‘viewing through

rose-colored glasses' if they are unreflexive and premised on a version of 'pure vision' (Jenks, 1995, p. 8).

All visuals are products of human decision, created through the interplay of multiple and contested social relations, and so therefore require an analysis that goes beyond the visual text itself to take context into account (Adelman, 1998; Banks, 2007; Becker, 1998; Pauwels, 2010).

3.3 INTEGRATING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND GROUNDED THEORY

3.3.1 Grounded Theory: A Brief History

The grounded theory method provides a systematic approach to collecting and analyzing data for the purpose of developing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The founders of grounded theory were Glaser and Strauss (1967), who in their seminal book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, advocated generating new theories emergent in both qualitative and quantitative data, rather than on verifying existing theories (Urquhart, 2013). Glaser and Strauss broke new terrain by proposing systematic strategies to enable abstract theorizing about social phenomena using qualitative methods (Charmaz, 2006; Urquhart, 2013). Features of the method include: simultaneous data collection, coding and analysis; constructing codes and categories grounded in the data; performing ongoing systematic and constant comparisons between all data throughout the inquiry; using a process of theoretical sampling to ensure rich saturation of category properties and to examine emerging analytical threads in the data; and moving beyond inductive logic to generate theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Urquhart, 2013). The researcher generates substantive theory by following analytical directions in the data, while taking care not to force their own preconceived notions onto the data.

Following their influential contribution to methodological debate and practice, Glaser and Strauss became embroiled in conflict over the fundamental principles and methods of grounded theory (Clarke, 2005; Evans, 2013; Urquhart, 2013). According to Charmaz (2006), Glaser continued to define grounded theory as “a method of discovery, treated categories as emergent from the data, relied on direct and, often, narrow empiricism, and analyzed a basic social process” (p. 8). Charmaz reports that Strauss began working with Corbin (see Corbin & Strauss,

1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1994), shifting his focus to verification and new technological procedures. Urquhart (2013) explains that Glaser emphatically disagreed with Corbin and Strauss' (1990) grounded theory 'how-to' manual, arguing that its restrictive suggestions for coding would disallow emergent conceptualizations and force the data to "give up" and falsely mould to preconceived theories. Other Glaser and Strauss divergences relate to theory generation, the role of the researcher, and timing of the literature review (Clarke, 2005; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Jones & Alony, 2011). See Jones and Alony (2011) and Evans (2013) for full discussions on the varying approaches to grounded theory.

Despite the intention of Glaser and Strauss (1967) to challenge a narrow objectivism in social science, and despite elements of constructionism in both strains (Charmaz, 2008), by 1990 both the Glaser and the Strauss strains of grounded theory were associated with positivism (Charmaz, 2006). Clarke (2005) for example, states that Glaser's version is "deeply positivistic" (p.17), using the language of core variables. She says that Glaser demonstrates "that he does not understand social constructionism as an epistemological/ontological position. He thinks *some* data are "constructed" while other data are "pure"" (Clarke, 2005, p. 17, *emphasis in original*).

Mills, Bonner, and Francis' (2006) reading of the seminal grounded theory texts and their consequential comparison of Glaser and Strauss' work shows that even though they found Strauss' position as more constructionist, he still "demonstrates a mixture of language that vacillates between postpositivism and constructivism, with a reliance on terms such as recognizing bias and maintaining objectivity when describing the position the researcher should assume in relation to the participants and the data" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 28).

A number of scholars have worked to shake grounded theory of its problematic positivist inclinations. Charmaz (1990; 2003; 2006; 2008), Clarke (2003; 2005), and Bryant (2002), among

others, have advanced use of a social constructionist and social constructivist grounded theory that allows researchers greater flexibility in drawing on multiple methods to analyze complex contexts more broadly. Mills and her colleagues (2006) report finding advocates of social constructivist grounded theory across the disciplines of education, psychology, occupational and environmental medicine, and nursing. Charmaz is perhaps the best-known proponent of combining social constructionism with grounded theory. In her earlier work, she called her methodological stance *social constructivist grounded theory* (Charmaz, 1990). In her more recent work, she has also described her position as framed by the more general rubric of *social constructionism* (Charmaz, 2008).

A note should be made here concerning the terms constructivism and constructionism, which often get used idiosyncratically despite the differences. Constructivists study how individuals create personal and social realities as well as how they develop systems for meaningfully understanding their worlds (Raskin, 2002). Radical versions of constructivism question whether humans can truly access an external or real world. Charmaz (2008) clarifies her constructivist position saying she “assumes the existence of an obdurate, real world that may be interpreted in multiple ways. I do not subscribe to the radical subjectivism assumed by some advocates of constructivism” (p.409). Like constructivists, constructionists emphasize human participation in constructing knowledge, but object to the idea of an isolated knower and disagree with those who contend knowing is an individualistic experience of mental reasoning (Gergen, 2001; Raskin, 2002). Rather, social constructionists highlight the complex, situated and relativistic nature of knowledge and knowing. They emphasize “how contextual, linguistic, and relational factors combine to determine the kinds of human beings that people will become and how their views of the world will develop. In social constructionism all knowledge is considered

local and fleeting. It is negotiated between people within a given context and time frame” (Raskin, 2002, p.9). This is all to say that I recognize that grounded theory has been adapted for use with Constructivist Theory (Charmaz, 1990; 2003) and social constructionism (Charmaz, 2008; Clarke, 2005; Liebenberg et al., 2012). Still, as Raskin (2002) notes, “the commonalities among the approaches outweigh the points of divergence” (p.2). For an indepth review of constructivism and social constructionism, please see Raskin (2002).

3.3.2 Social Constructionist Grounded Theory

A “regrounded” grounded theory (Clarke, 2005), or constructionist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2008), is especially well suited to studies focusing on “difference of perspective, of highly complex situations of action and positionality, of heterogeneous discourses, and situated knowledges of life thereby produced” (Clarke, 2005, pg. xxiii). Through constant comparison and verification of relationships between concepts and categories generated inductively and saturated conceptually, the researcher is able to develop substantive theory grounded in the data. Though the participants’ and the researcher’s interpretations are included as part of the analysis, the primary emphasis is on *conceptualization rather than description*.

The grounded theory method originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is underpinned by symbolic interactionism and pragmatist philosophy, making it congruent with an interpretive, constructionist disposition (Clarke, 2003; 2005). Symbolic interactionism, a term coined by Herbert Blumer, is derived from pragmatism and grew from work pioneered by Cooley, Dewey, Thomas and especially Mead (Stryker, 1987). Its core premise is that “the individual and society are interdependent and inseparable - both are constituted through shared meanings” (Pascale, 2011, p. 78). It prompts the researcher to investigate the meanings participants make from their experiences and situations. Charmaz (1990) argues that “[b]y

starting with the data from the lived experience of the research participants, the researcher can, from the beginning, attend to how they construct their worlds. That lived experience shapes the researcher's approach to data collection and analysis" (p. 1162).

Social constructionist grounded theory, as characterized by Charmaz (2008), makes the following assumptions: "1) reality is multiple, processual, and constructed - but constructed under particular conditions; 2) the research process emerges from interaction; 3) it takes into account the researcher's positionality, as well as that of the research participants; and 4) the researcher and researched co-construct the data - data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it" (Charmaz, 2008, p. 402). In other words, researchers need to understand participants' views and position their voices as central to the analysis. Theory doesn't "emerge" from the data; rather the researcher constructs the categories and the resulting analysis. The researcher leaves an extensive literature review until the categories have been developed, albeit with the recognition that no one goes into the research endeavor as a 'blank slate,' free from any prior disciplinary knowledge or theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2006). Importantly, the method maintains as a central premise the examination of "meaning in context," and presumes a social and theoretical setting within which substantive findings are generated.

3.4 THE BENEFITS OF USING QUALITATIVE AND VISUAL METHODS IN THE STUDY OF YOUTH RESILIENCE

Designing research for use with diverse populations, and in particular with youth whose perspectives may differ from the mainstream, has its challenges. Factors to take into consideration include the power and language barriers between participants and researchers, and other complex ethical issues, such as gaining access to participants and making sure the methods we use are effective in gaining, interpreting and representing youths' stories (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Punch, 2002a). These are important considerations in the current research. Over the past 20 years, rural Hants County has faced ongoing socio-economic challenges but no known research has been conducted on the locally protective pathways rural youth there utilize when resources are few or in decline. The methods employed need to be able to recognize potentially unknown or undocumented processes that may play a role in how young people understand and construct their social realities.

Qualitative research has the power to address the aforementioned complexities, because it has been successful at: producing first-voice accounts, though still more works needs to be done to learn from marginalized populations (Marecek, Fine, & Kidder, 2001; Pink, 2001a; Ungar, 2008); challenging adult-centric perspectives and researcher standpoint bias (Ungar, 2003); and providing new knowledge about culturally and contextually-embedded processes (Didkowsky et al., 2010; Forsyth, 2009; Mertens, 2009; Ungar, 2008). It can uncover previously unnamed or hidden processes by broadly inquiring into spaces undocumented by quantitative research (Didkowsky et al., 2010; Marecek et al., 2001; Ungar, 2003, 2004).

I also wanted to embrace a research design that is creative, fun and benefits from the inclusion of more youth-friendly, participative methods (Epstein et al., 2006). The researcher can

do this in part by incorporating youth-driven visual methods into the research repertoire. Visual methods can help: amplify the authenticity of findings; minimize cultural and power barriers; overcome language barriers; empower youth to recognize individual and community strengths; and produce new knowledge of social phenomena. Visual data can offer supplementary insights that may be inaccessible via other methods alone (Cameron et al., 2009; Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Theron, Mitchell, Stuart & Smith, 2011). These benefits, however, are specific to visual research that: uses participant-focused techniques; has reflexivity and reciprocity at its core; and aims to shift power to the participants.

Amplifying the authenticity of the findings: When researchers adopt participant-directed visual methods of production, they permit the researcher to “see” into the participants’ worlds. We begin to understand from the participant’s point of view which relationships, places and artefacts are considered important enough to be captured and shared (Hall, Jones, Hall, Richardson, & Hodgson, 2007; Harrison, 2002; Noland, 2006). Participants determine the direction of visual-elicitation interviews by deciding what to capture visually and share with the researcher, and thus are the experts in explaining their realities and social conceptions (Ball & Smith, 1992; Harper, 2002). Participants’ perspectives are embedded and constrained by socio-cultural contexts and expectations (Temple & McVittie, 2005), so when researchers attend more comprehensively to participants’ explanations, a type of member-check occurs where the accuracy and credibility of the researcher’s interpretation is amplified (Hall et al., 2007).

Minimizing cultural, power and language barriers: According to Liebenberg (2009a), visual methods work well where issues of trust and communication are thorny due to heightened boundaries between the researcher and participant (i.e., due to gender, age, social status, education differences). Power incongruities and culturally-specific communication barriers can

lead to: cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations (Liebenberg, 2009a); issues of trust (Liebenberg, 2009a; Noland, 2006); linguistic complications (Mannay, 2010); a lack of shared knowledge, contributing to participants' inability to explicate obscure aspects of their lives (Mannay, 2010); and the researcher's lack of awareness of the local discourses and social relationships shaping the way participants understand their worlds. Visual methods can act as a communication tool to help diminish these dilemmas (Bolten, Pole, & Mizen, 2001; Liebenberg 2009a; 2011). A material go-between (like images) helps participants, particularly youth, feel less "on the spot," because there is something on which to focus (Banks, 2001; Clark-Ibanez, 2007; Didkowsky et al., 2010; Noland, 2006). When youth create and show their own images, they understand the conversation will be "driven" by them, and are thus more likely to uninhibitedly and more articulately delve deeply into explaining their interpretations, relationships and experiences (Banks, 2001; Blinn & Harrist, 1991; Liebenberg, 2009a; Noland, 2006; Prosser & Loxley, 2008).

Shifting control to the participants: Auto-driven visual methods are one way to place participants in the role of the expert (Banks, 2001; Harper, 2002; Kolb, 2008), provide them the power to decide which parts of their lives to include in the research record (Liebenberg, 2009b; Rich & Patashnick, 2002) and give them the authority to lead the direction of their storytelling to present themselves as they would like (Drew, Duncan, & Sawyer, 2010; Noland, 2006). Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argues for a shift in the research agenda away from the underlying colonial assumptions and values that she states continue to inform Western paradigms of research on the "Other." She opposes research conducted 'on' indigenous or marginalized populations – research that attempts to objectively and from a distance study and define communities through a post-colonial 'gaze.' She argues for decolonization of research practices, where communities have the

right and opportunity to decide how and whether they are involved in research projects, and represent their own perspectives and worldviews in ways that make sense to them, even if in opposition to dominant conceptions. Decolonization and democratization of the research process (Ballengee-Morris, & Stuhr, 2001; Grant & Luxford, 2009; Mitchell, DeLange, Moletsane, Stuart, & Buthelezi, 2005; Smith, 1999) advances participant ownership of the research problem and transforms the community resident into a community advocate (Kolb, 2008).

Engaging participants to recognize their strengths and community assets: In part because visual methods are fun (Allatt & Dixon, 2004; Drew et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2007), participants engage intensely with the creation of their images and narratives (Rich & Patashnick, 2002). They begin to contemplate their daily life experiences and generate opinions about the relationships and spaces around them (Daniels, 2006; Drew et al., 2010; Kolb, 2008; Wagner, 1979). Kolb (2008) suggests that visuals prompt participants to shift from focusing on life challenges to appreciating potential opportunities. In her research, participants documented their orientations toward personal concepts of illness and health using cameras. Kolb noted a distinct transition in what the participants recorded over time, moving from initially documenting illness-related aspects of their lives to increasingly concentrating on the positive, health-promoting resources available to them. Personal appreciation gives youth the confidence to further cultivate other social competencies (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004).

Producing new knowledge of social phenomena: When an interview is led by participants' images, whether they be photographs, maps, moving video or otherwise, unexpected details outside the realm of the researcher's experience may arise (Cooper & Yarbrough, 2010; Didkowsky et al., 2010; Drew et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2007). Images may prompt participants to recall memories unrelated to image content (Didkowsky et al., 2010;

Liebenberg, 2009a; Harrison, 2002; Martin & Martin, 2004; Prosser & Loxley, 2008) and can capture unanticipated or previously unarticulated processes that reflect contextually and culturally specific perspectives (Didkowsky et al., 2010; Theron et al., 2011a). Visuals can also show aspects of participants' interactions with their social and material worlds that they might not think to mention, or may not realize about themselves (Allatt & Dixon, 2004; Blinn & Harrist, 1991; Bolten et al., 2001; Felstead, Jewson, & Walters, 2004; Harper, 2002; Noland, 2006). "The image can reveal that which respondents cannot say in words, are not aware that they know and do not realize is of immense relevance to the project" (Felstead et al., 2004, p. 118). Even "absent images can reveal presences" (Allatt & Dixon, 2004, p. 94). Images taken by youth can also allow a peek behind closed doors to see things, locations and interactions we may otherwise never access (Keller, Fleury, Perez, Ainsworth, & Vaughan, 2008).

Visual methods have the potential to show "hidden" aspects of topics of interest, patterns of behavior and resources available to participants (Didkowsky et al., 2010; Keller et al., 2008; Ungar et al., 2011) that may not be disclosed through interviews or surveys alone (Cooper & Yarbrough, 2010). In the Negotiating Resilience Project, team members found that the content on the still and moving images told as much about the participants' communities and support structures (both available and lacking) as they did about the individual youth (Cameron et al., 2009; Didkowsky et al., 2010; Theron et al., 2011a). The team was able to note the absence of safe places for impoverished teens to play together, and how in these absences youth navigate their way to resources that support psychosocial development in ways adults may not expect or culturally condone (Didkowsky et al., 2010; Liebenberg et al., 2012). Indeed, visual methods, when they help uncover counter-narratives, can be tools for social reformation (Ballengee-Morris et al., 2001). As Harrison (2002) asserts, "If, as a number of authors have argued, photography is

a component in the acquisition of knowledge and the exercise of power, then it might also be a means of resistance” (p. 23).

Benefits specific to video: In addition to the benefits described above, video as a medium has the ability to flow through time, expanding the density, complexity, precision and scope of what can be captured and analyzed (Banks, 2001; Collier, 1979; Dant, 2004; Downing, 2008; Lomax & Casey, 1998; Rich & Patashnick, 2002). Video cameras can record even the tiniest minutia of situated social interaction (Cameron et al., 2009; Gillen & Cameron, 2010; Lomax & Casey, 1998; Pink, 2007b) and can be watched and re-watched repeatedly (Dant, 2004). The video camera is also “unique in its ability to preserve interaction for representation as well as record participants’ awareness of that video camera’s ability (a characteristic which sets visual data apart from other forms of observational data)” (Lomax & Casey, 1998, para.16). Lomax and Casey (1998) explored the ways participants performed and negotiated their knowledge when filmed. They used a video camera to record mid-wives as they spoke about their work. However, they turned the video camera on as they were setting up for the research interviews, which enabled them to capture the data collection *process*. The authors were able to capture and analyze the impacts of having a video camera present, as well as how the researcher and midwife negotiated what was or was not permitted to be recorded on video. Using video allowed the researchers to review and reflect on their processes for appropriately entering a participant’s home, and were able to redefine how to best accomplish an amenable research context.

3.5 THE RESEARCH METHODS

3.5.1 The Research Site, Participants and Recruitment

Nineteen (19) youth (9 males, 10 females) between the ages of 18 to 23 years took part in the research. The participants were recommended to the project by community contacts, who identified the participants as youth who were doing well despite contending with “conditions collectively viewed as adverse” (Ungar, 2004, p. 342) as a result of ongoing shifts in their rural communities. Many of the participants were also dealing with other personal and family adversities considered significant enough to be risks to their positive development. The research was conducted in a subsection of rural Hants County in the Municipality of East Hants, where the substantial movement of young people away from the area, and the access to youth populations living in areas undergoing ongoing economic restructuring, made it an important location to conduct resilience research. Youth participants were primarily from the rural Shore/Central area of Hants County. The map in the Introduction (See Figure 1) shows the geographical area in which the research took place. Participants were purposely recruited from areas experiencing population decline and youth out-migration. Youth were not recruited from Corridor communities (i.e. Lantz, Elmsdale, Enfield, and Milford), which have experienced an increase in population movement into the general area (Municipality of East Hants Socio-Economic Study, 2008). Youth participants were high school graduates. The age bracket of 18 to 23 years for youth participants was selected because of the potential developmental, economic, and educational crossroads faced by rural youth of this age group. Youth in this age group are finishing high school and making decisions about whether to leave, or continue to remain in, their rural locales.

Recruiting was facilitated through personal and professional contacts with local community organizations already known to young people in the area. The community contacts were known to me as a result of my growing up and living in rural Hants County. My community contacts included volunteers and organizers involved in community sports, recreation, music, and youth-groups. Contacts were connected with youth through their involvement in 4-H, local church groups, sports clubs (i.e. minor baseball), and local volunteer fire departments. Several youth were identified by a previous Hants North Rural High (HNRH) administrator, as well as current HNRH educators. Community contacts first contacted potential youth participants to tell them about the project and to inform them that they would like to recommend them to the project. Youth were provided an Information Letter (see Appendix A) detailing the research and what they could expect. Youth were afforded time to reflect on whether they wished to participate, and were provided my contact information so they could contact me directly. In some cases, the participants told the community contact to give me their number so that I could contact them directly. Extreme care was taken to assure potential youth participants that taking part in the study was completely voluntary, and that they were in no way obligated to take part, nor were incentives seen to be large enough to be coercive to participation. The Voluntary Informed Consent Form and Participant Photo and Video Release Form, both signed by participants, can be found in the Appendices as Appendix B and C, respectively.

3.5.2 Research Methods

I purposefully used a wide range of qualitative data gathering techniques to capture the multiplicities of meanings associated with youth resilience and rural economic restructuring. The methods included qualitative interviews, life-space mapping, auto-driven photo-elicitation; *day in the life* video recordings and elicitation interviews, and field-notes of *day in the life*

observations. The methods built upon and expanded those used in the '*Negotiating Resilience Project: Protective Processes of Children in Transition across Cultures and Contexts.*' The *Negotiating Resilience Project* was led by Dr. Michael Ungar at the Resilience Research Centre (RRC), Dalhousie University, Dr. Linda Liebenberg (RRC) and Dr. Ann Cameron (University of British Columbia), and coordinated by me. Funded from 2007-2010 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the project was comprised of intensive case studies that explored the resources vital to healthy development of diverse youth populations in transition in India, Thailand, China, South Africa, Canada and Brazil. It is important to note the key differences between the approaches taken in this doctoral study to those used in the *Negotiating Resilience Project*. In my doctoral research I added the method of life-space mapping to the research repertoire. The *Negotiating Resilience Project* was an exploratory project with a sample size of two youth (1 boy, 1 girl) per site. The small number of participants meant that we analysed the data within-case (i.e. each participant) and across-case (i.e. the entire collection of data). In the current doctoral project, I move the research beyond exploration and description, to generate substantive theory. In the *Negotiating Resilience Project*, the youth participants were early- to mid-adolescents between the ages of 12 and 16 years, whereas in this research the age bracket for participation was late-adolescents to young adults 18 to 23 years of age.

In the current research, all participants (N=19) took part in the interview, photo-elicitation and life-mapping portions of the project. Four of the participants (2 males, 2 females) were invited to participate in the *day in the life* video portion of the project.

Qualitative interviews: Youth participants took part in a preliminary interview designed to understand their perspectives and experiences of living in a rural community. The interviews

focussed on the opportunities, resources and supports available to youth, as well as their perceived barriers to resilience in their communities. A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix D) with prompting questions was created, but participants were also able to direct the interviews into areas that they chose. My approach to the interviews was constructionist, the interviews being an active interaction between researcher and participant (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Roulston, 2010; 2011). The interviews enabled contextualization of the photo-elicitation and video portions of the research. The interviews were audio-recorded, took approximately one hour, and occurred in a private location agreed to by the participants.

Life-space mapping: Life-space mapping is a cooperative process between the participant and the researcher. The life-space map “incorporates a shift in emphasis away from the individual in isolation, towards seeing the individual as intimately connected and situated in a complex social world” (Rodgers, 2011, n.p.). Youth were provided with paper, markers and other drawing materials, and were asked to draw themselves in relation to aspects considered meaningful in their “worlds.” They were asked meaning-generating questions (see Appendix E) to prompt reflection on complex and interconnected information about their lives (Rodgers, 2011). They could use symbols, words, drawings, and sentences to illustrate the relationships, spaces, and resources available to them, as well as those that are lacking. The maps were used as a way for youth to creatively and conceptually depict the interrelationships between their views of resilience and risk, and the assets and resource deficiencies in their communities. According to Marshall (2002), life-space mapping can help youth remember and explicate information that may not be easy to reveal in stand-alone interviews.

Auto-driven photo-elicitation: The photo-elicitation process was originally developed and utilized by Collier and his colleagues in the mid-1950s to generate consensus within a team of

researchers (Prosser & Loxley, 2008), and has since been adapted for use in a variety of research arenas, including as a supplement other methods. Photo-elicitation emphasizes the use of images to accumulate rich verbal data, rather than the focus being primarily on the images (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Hall et al., 2007). When used to understand the first-voice accounts of participants, it involves an iterative, reflexive and dialogical process intended “to gain an insight into the life-worlds of those who participate in our studies” (Prosser & Loxley, 2008, p. 19). In this study, youth participants were provided with a disposable camera. Over the course of roughly one week (or as long as they needed), youth documented how they navigate their lives, their challenges, their supports, the places, things and people who are meaningful to them, and anything else they wanted to show me about their lives. Youth were not provided a guideline on how many photos they should take per day; youth chose how, when and where they took their photographs. Some youth took a number of photographs at one time, while other participants spread their capturing of images out over the course of one or more weeks. Youth *were* asked, however, to refrain from taking photographs of people and/or situations that could put them in danger. If they wished to speak about dangerous or illegal activities occurring in their communities, it was suggested that they take photographs of objects meant to symbolize these themes. Once the photographs were taken, I collected and developed the youths’ images, which they later reflected upon in an open-ended photo-elicitation interview (see the photo-elicitation script in Appendix F).

Day in the Life video recording and elicitation interview: The day in the life (DITL) video methodology is based on an ongoing interdisciplinary investigation led by Dr. Ann Cameron (University of British Columbia) to explore the makings of “strong” or thriving toddlers, kindergarten children, and older adults in diverse communities across the globe (See Gillen et al., 2006). The technique was later adapted for use with youth as part of the Negotiating

Resilience Project. The goal of the procedure is to capture the day-to-day interactions that are enacted with and by youth. Approximately six hours of filming occurred with each participant, but youth could stop the videotaping any time that they wanted. Participants could orchestrate their *days* in ways that they chose, and determined which parts of their lives they wished to share. Following the DITL taping, I contacted the participant to discuss the meanings they attributed to particular occurrences, interactions and dialogues that had occurred throughout the *day*. I then independently made selections of the *day's* events that seemed to display the range of activities and quality of interactions engaged by youth. A half-hour compilation video consisting of approximately six five-minute clips was made. I then returned to the youth to have them view and reflect upon the compilation. The video-elicitation script can be found as Appendix F.

Observation notes: During the DITL filming, I operated a small digital video recorder while a research assistant that I had trained prior to the *day*, recorded observation notes. The research assistant documented sensory details (for example, what they saw, the sounds they heard, and the ambiance of particular settings). They noted the actions and interactions occurring at each stage of the *day*, and indicated when new people came into the setting. They wrote down youths' movements from place to place and the artefacts salient in each space. The observation notes were written on a template (see Appendix G) and then later transcribed by the research assistant.

3.5.3 Sequence of the Research

The sequence of the research involved multiple steps. These included: obtaining research ethics approval; recruiting and training research assistants; identifying participants and gaining consent; conducting private interviews and life-space mapping with youth participants; youth photo-elicitation; conducting photo-elicitation interviews; selecting four participants for the

DITL video recording; filming the DITL; selecting the DITL focal interchanges and creating the DITL compilation video; and conducting the DITL video-elicitation interview. Data collection occurred over multiple iterations. Data coding and analysis took place concurrently with data collection, explained in detail below. Analysis involved processes of constant comparison, memo-writing, conceptual mapping, theoretical sampling, examination of the relevant interdisciplinary literatures, and final analysis.

Obtaining research ethics approval: Research ethics approval was obtained from the Dalhousie University Social Sciences & Humanities Research Ethics Board in November 2012. Field research took place in Hants County, Nova Scotia from November 2012 to April 2014.

Recruiting and training research assistants: Three research assistants were recruited and trained to take field-notes for the DITL portion of the research. Only one researcher joined me during each DITL filming occasion in the field. The research assistants had all previously lived in Hants County. They were in their late 20s to early 30s and unknown personally to the research participants. They included a project manager at a Halifax non-profit organization, a doctoral student in the field of education, and my brother, a Dalhousie University research assistant studying aging.

Identifying participants and gaining consent: The recruitment process has been described in detail above. Once youth indicated an interest in taking part and had read the Information Letter, I met with them to discuss the project. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, what the study would entail, the time it would take to complete each part of the study, and when these parts would occur. Extreme care was taken to ensure that youth participants understood that: taking part in the study was completely voluntary; they could withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer specific questions; and that they were

in no way obligated to take part. All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before, during, and after the study. The consent forms clearly stated the risks and benefits associated with participation in a study involving video cameras and cameras. They were told that only a pseudonym would ever be used, and specific details of where they live would never be shared. Due to the small sample size, some minor alterations were made to identifying information, in order to better protect the anonymity of the participants. The constraints on anonymity as a result of the visual methodologies are discussed in the Ethical Considerations section below. All participants agreed to have their faces shown on images they took of themselves or were taken of them, and signed a photo/video release form. It was explained to participants that if they took photographs of other people's faces, they had to first get verbal permission, but that they should not take pictures of anyone who declined or expressed reluctance. They understood that if I, as the researcher, wanted to show (in publications or at conferences) the faces of non-participants, then I would obtain consents from these individuals myself after the fact (The Photo Release Form for Individuals Photographed by Youth Participants is included as Appendix H). Otherwise, it would be my responsibility to blur all images of any individual other than the participant to render them unidentifiable, before showing these in any public forum. It was emphasized to the DITL participants that while other people may be captured on camera, the focus of the study was specifically on them. When others were in sight of the camera, I asked bystanders if they minded being filmed. Where they declined (one person declined), the camera was turned off until they left or turned away as appropriate. The script utilized when bystanders walked into the view of the video camera is provided as Appendix I. Participants were made aware that they could review anything they said in their interview and reflection statements or on videotape at any point up to six months later.

Compensation of \$50.00 was provided to youth who took part in the photo-elicitation, interview and life-space mapping portions of the research. The four youth who also took part in the DITL filming received \$100.00 total to thank them for their extra time commitment.

Conducting private interviews and life-space mapping with youth participants: Following signing the consent forms, youth participants took part in the private interview. On the same day, participants drew life-space maps.

Youth photo-elicitation: On the same day as the private interviews, the youth were provided with a disposable camera and given instructions on how to use the apparatus. Youth could document for one week (or more if needed) anything they wanted to talk to me about, including their obstacles, risks, resources, supports, and how they navigate through challenges in their lives. Youth could take as many or as few photographs (up to 24) that they wanted to share; however, it was suggested that they take approximately 10 to 15 photographs. The film was then collected for processing and development. Some youth chose to use their own or a family digital camera. Though not instructed to do so, many youth chose to show me previously-taken photographs of importance to them.

Conducting photo-elicitation interviews: Once the participant finished capturing their photographs, and I had their images developed and returned individually to each youth to have them reflect on their photo data. After youth briefly described the importance of each photograph for them and why they wanted to share it, I asked them to select 4 to 5 images to discuss in more detail. Together, we looked at the images in terms of what they represented for the youth. Often the photograph was used as a jumping-off point for youth to tell me about other aspects of their lives. Before ending the elicitation interview, I asked youth what they would like to have photographed but did not, and why? Youth interpretations of the content, purpose and meaning

of their photographs helped me to gain understanding of the predominant and contrasting discourses around issues of resilience and risk, as well as the supports, relationships and resources important in their lives.

Selecting four participants for the DITL video recording: In the initial iteration of data collection, 10 participants took part in the photo-elicitation, interview and life-space mapping portions of the research. Based on the emergent concepts constructed from the initial coding of this data, four of the participants (2 males, 2 females) were invited to participate in the video portion of the project. The criteria for inviting youth to participate in the *day in the life* method related to whether youth intended to stay or leave their rural community and their stated motivations behind their residential intentions. The four DITL participants included: two youth (1 male, 1 female), who reported they intended to make a life in their rural community because they *chose* to, despite the challenges faced), and two youth (1 male, 1 female) who, though currently living in their rural community, reported they intended on leaving once they had the options or resources available to them. As the research continued, more youth were recruited to take part in the study, using the same recruiting procedure as described above, for a total of 19 participants.

Filming the DITL: On the day of the DITL, a research assistant joined me and we travelled together to meet with the youth at an agreed-upon location. I explained to the youth the process of the filming, and again reiterated the information in the consent form. The research assistant and I followed the youth as they went about their *day*, video-taping as much of the *day* as possible. The research assistant recorded observation notes and I filmed using the hand-held video-camera. Participants orchestrated their *days* in ways that they chose. Approximately 5 to 7 hours of film was captured during each *day*.

Selecting the focal interchanges and creating the DITL compilation video: Based on decisions made following an in-depth viewing of the full DITL footage and the discussion with the youth participant about their experiences during the *day*, I independently edited a half-hour compilation video of approximately six five-minute clips for each participant, using video editing software. The videos showcased clips of interactions the youth engaged in over the day that appeared to reveal aspects of protective processes as well as instances that I was interested in learning more about.

Conducting the DITL video-elicitation interview: I returned to the youth who participated in the video portion of the research to have them view the compilation video. Youth were asked to explain more about what happened in each clip, what they were feeling at the time, any of their strengths, capacities or challenges they felt the video portrayed, and whether they believed other events during the day should have been chosen to be included on the compilation video. The discussion was audio-recorded and later transcribed and coded.

Data analysis: The methods employed to code and interpret the data made use of a social constructionist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Liebenberg et al., 2012). The goal in grounded theory is to construct substantive theory that offers “an interpretive portrayal of the studied world” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). The data collection, coding, and analysis steps are not linear but concurrent (Charmaz, 1990). Thus, in my research, coding and analysis (as preliminary as the initial analyses were), began as soon as there were data, and continued over the entire course of the field research and into the final analysis phase (Clarke, 2005). The data analysis procedure is described in detail below.

3.5.4 Data Analysis

Though I took a course in using NVIVO qualitative data analysis software and had the software available to me, I purposefully decided to code and analyze all data by hand, in order to remain as physically close to the data as possible. I adapted the coding template used in the Negotiating Resilience Project (See Liebenberg et al., 2012). The template provides space to insert transcriptions of interviews, visual data reflections, and field notes, and then write codes alongside the transcriptions. I added columns to the template, to allow for initial (open) codes, focussed codes, theoretical codes and notes all to appear on one document.

Initial (or open) coding began as soon as I started collecting data. All transcribed interviews (including preliminary interviews, photo-elicitation interviews, and DITL-elicitation interviews) were coded line-by-line, whereby I tried to attach at least one action/ process-focussed code to each line of data. Conversations that happened while youth drew their life-space maps were also transcribed and coded. The visual data (including life-space maps, youth photographs, and the *day in the life* videos) were coded using the methods developed by the Negotiating Resilience Project (NRP) (Liebenberg et al., 2012). For each participant, each photograph was looked at individually, as well as grouped and regrouped with the other photos to note patterns. I noted the photo contents (who, what or which locations were depicted in each photo), as well as what was seemingly absent from the image (Liebenberg et al., 2012). The compositionality was assessed, paying attention to what was evident in the foreground and background of photographs (Collier, 1979). This process was also used to code the life-space maps. Because the photographs and maps were primarily used to prompt reflection from the participants, the participant's interpretation of the images was the primary coding focus.

Initial coding of the DITL video occurred when I watched the full *day* and made notes about emergent processes and themes, and documented “youth interactions within contexts that pointed to the strengths of the youth, challenges the youth faces, and the range of interactions and activities that they engage in” (Liebenberg et al., 2012, p. 62). Segments of the data depicting these contexts, interactions and themes were compiled into the 30-minute video. Though the full DITL videos were used in the analysis for the project, only the data from the 30 minute compilation videos were transcribed and inserted into the coding template. On the template, I transcribed the conversations I could hear on the video, and then coded incident to incident (Charmaz, 2006) for both what youth and their interactants were *saying*, as well as what they were *doing* (Liebenberg et al., 2012). The observation notes from the research assistants helped me to locate potential segments of interest in the videos. The notes were also examined to gain insight into what was happening outside the range of the camera, and to take into account the context and important artefacts within it more broadly (Gillen et al., 2006). Open coding resulted in over 1000 action-focussed codes.

Focused coding: Coding and analysis of the data became more analytical over multiple coding phases, allowing me to reduce the 1000 initial codes to 60 focussed codes that I felt best synthesized and conceptualized the data (Charmaz, 2006). Using the constant comparative method, I compared new data with previously coded data sources, which often then prompted a review of previously coded data, as is common and suggested in grounded theory. In the constant comparative method, the researcher begins by first comparing and contrasting instance to instance within one source of data (for example, within one participant’s preliminary interview), then across one participant’s data set (for example, comparing codes between one participant’s interview with those in the same participant’s reflection on their photographs), and then across

all participants' data (comparing participant to participant). Later, concepts are compared with concepts to develop categories, which are then integrated into theory via theoretical coding (Evans, 2013). Potential theoretical relationships between categories were related in memos, to move my “analytic story in a theoretical direction” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63).

Memos and conceptual maps: I wrote memos to record analytical contemplations. Memo-writing helped reveal underlying and unstated assumptions in the data, as well as where gaps existed in understanding the properties of categories. I developed conceptual maps to explore possible connections between theoretical codes.

Theoretical sampling: The grounded theory method encourages the researcher “to follow interests, leads, and hunches that they find or identify in the data. Then they may gather more data, ask more questions, and check their developing categories” (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1162). In theoretical sampling, researchers seek new data and gather statements, events and cases for the various theoretical categories to ensure conceptual saturation. Theoretical sampling occurs specifically to strengthen the theoretical development of the research, *not* to sample participants in an effort to increase participant numbers or to ensure statistical generalizability of the results (Charmaz, 2006).

Theoretical sampling involved returning to 6 specifically-selected youth (3 male, 3 female) to obtain new data based on the conceptual directions being constructed in my analysis. These youth were selected because their perspectives differentially aligned with diverse patterns in the data related to conceptualizations of, and pathways to, resilience, as well as their different residential intentions. My aim was to check my interpretations of the data and to increase the precision and robustness of my categories. The benefit of collecting more than one source of data over multiple meetings with each participant was that I could ask youth follow-up questions in

later interviews to fill gaps or to clarify the meanings of their prior statements. Returning to each participant to obtain reflection interviews also helped serve as member checks, where youth could confirm, challenge or clarify my initial interpretations of their experiences (Liebenberg et al., 2012). So although six participants were selected for more intensive theoretical sampling, use of the constant comparison method allowed me to ask follow-up questions and pursue theoretical leads with all participants in revisits.

Theoretical coding: Once categories were saturated, theoretical coding occurred. The memos and conceptual maps were sorted, clustered, and integrated. By doing so, “a meaningful schema of interpretation of the causal relationships is produced, linking the conceptual outcomes of the analysis” (Jones & Alony, 2011, p. 108).

Theoretical comparison, dispute and integration with relevant interdisciplinary literatures: Although I was already familiar with the resilience literature, I waited until I had sufficient theoretical direction to conduct the extensive literature review. Delaying the literature review in social constructionist grounded theory is done to prevent premature closing of analysis (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Conceptual findings are used to challenge, support or extend relevant literatures (Charmaz, 2006; Evans, 2013). My literature research compared and integrated knowledge contributions from diverse disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, youth development, and social work, each of which has contributed discourses on the concept of youth resilience. Likewise, the impacts of rural restructuring have been discussed using geographical, sociological, anthropological, and political-economic approaches (Woods, 2011). The study of youth resilience within transitioning economies is unequivocally one area of inquiry that demands a comprehensive integration of interdisciplinary literatures due to its inherent complexity. No one discipline holds the key to understanding the ways in which rural youth

experiencing interpersonal and spatial transitions, find and engage the resources necessary to foster resilience.

In order to examine the multifaceted methodological and theoretical intersections occurring between the interdisciplinary literatures around rural restructuring, youth development, *and* resilience, I used a process termed *discursive negotiation*. The process of discursive negotiation was suggested to me by my supervisor, Dr. Michael Ungar (personal communication). Discursive negotiation involves a practice of embracing reflexive orientation. Reflexive inquirers recognize the benefits of combining approaches and make an effort to bridge epistemological divides (Cameron et al., 2009; Pink, 2001b; 2003; Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Romm, 1998). They acknowledge that a single discipline-based framework might restrict the ways in which data can be interpreted, which would thus limit the possibilities for knowledge production.

With this in mind, discursive negotiation was engaged, whereby an effort was made to recognize tensions and contrasts, as well as the junctions of complimentary theoretical constructs, across disciplines. The consideration of strains and overlaps between disciplines as relational rather than oppositional is hoped to help pave the way for the advancement of interdisciplinary knowledge. I provide here some examples of analogous concepts that arose at the boundaries of disciplines that required discursive negotiation in my work. To begin, in the psychology, sociology, and rural studies literature, complimentary and interrelated yet distinct concepts to “successful adjustment” include: positive adjustment, positive adaptation, positive development, and social competence. Importantly, it must be understood that *resilience* or *successful adjustment during challenging transitions*, is not equivalent to social competence or positive mental health, because resilience can only be identified in the presence of stress, but not

in its absence (Rutter, 2010). In other words, the study of resilience diverges with the study of positive development because resilience presupposes that positive adaptation has occurred despite exposure to challenging environments or risks, while the study of positive development does not make this assumption (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Ungar & Lerner, 2008). Whether the youth in my study have shown positive adaptation, social competence, successful adjustment, (or any other analogous term), it has been *while negotiating the stresses associated with socioeconomic restructuring*.

As another example, discursive negotiation was employed in arbitration over the analogous constructs of “cognition” and “meaning-making.” In much of the psychology literature, there is emphasis on cognitive processes (see the stress and coping literature, which details the ways in which stressors are appraised, perceived and then evaluated in order to form a coping reaction). In the current work, cognition is seen as playing an important role in how people attend to, interpret and respond in varying situations; however, I also suggest that processes of meaning-making cannot be understood by, as Boyden (2000) states, “universal theoretical schema...[stress and adversity] are experienced within context and are patterned by the cultural meanings they manifest. So, while healing and similar processes may be experienced in ways that are intensely personal, individuals understand and engage with misfortune through mechanisms that are socially mediated” (para. 32). Meaning-making implies recognition of both the physiological responses to adversity, as well as how those responses are produced and positioned by meaningful historical, social and cultural frameworks (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Sameroff, 2010).

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

The criteria for evaluating trustworthiness or rigour in qualitative research stand in contrast to those used in quantitative research. In quantitative research, scholars aim for benchmarks of validity, objectivity, generalizability, and reliability (Morrow, 2005). In qualitative research, tenets of rigour are tied to the underlying paradigms and disciplines within which the studies are grounded (Morrow, 2005). My own view echoes those who contend that researchers play a pronounced role in the co-construction of the research environment and the data collected (Chalfen, Sherman, & Rich, 2010; Daniels, 2006; Jenkins, Woodward, & Winter, 2008; Lomax & Casey, 1998; Mertens, 2009; Prosser, 2000), from our epistemologies to our selection of methods.

I use Morrow's (2005) recommendations for assuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. She advises that researchers should address: adequacy of data; subjectivity and reflexivity; and adequacy of interpretation. She also highlights the usefulness of assessing social validity specifically in psychology research, which was not performed here.

3.6.1 Adequacy of Data

Adequacy of data refers to the quality of data collected, given the research question (Morrow, 2005). Data adequacy in qualitative research cannot be determined by assessing the number of participants. Instead, we must look at the "information richness of the cases selected" (Patton, 2002, p. 185). Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002), would also add that we need to provide the reader enough information so that they can assess the appropriateness and rigour of the methods used to collect the data. My reasons for selecting the particular qualitative

methods that I did in my research, and their fit given my resilience focus and social constructionist stance, have been deliberated in detail above.

Having enough – and complete - data will allow the researcher to conduct a deliberate search for discrepant cases as theory develops. Finding variation within a process may especially become apparent during theoretical sampling, but it is not seen as a hindrance. Rather, it provides the researcher the opportunity to theorize how, when and why conceptual categories vary, which strengthens the analytical work (Charmaz, 2006). I have done my best to ensure I have presented participants' diverse stances and experiences equitably, so that not only a few voices (or just the voice of myself as the researcher) are brought to the fore.

3.6.2 Subjectivity and Reflexivity

Social constructionists are “more likely to embrace the positioning of the researcher as co-creator of meaning, as integral to the interpretations of the data, and as unapologetically political in purpose” (Morrow, 2005, p. 254). A reflexive stance increases the credibility of the work, because has at its core the awareness of the researcher's role in determining, acquiring, and analyzing data (Lynn & Lea, 2005). Researchers will find themselves crossing methodological, conceptual and communication boundaries (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009), even in contexts familiar to them (Mannay, 2010). It is the obligation of the researcher to acknowledge their subjectivities (Lynn & Lea, 2005), thereby allowing the researcher's interpretation of the data to be laid bare and contested (Karlsson, 2001; Prosser, 2000). Otherwise, the researcher may be faced with questions about whose perceptions are represented in the findings (Morrow, 2005).

Two key methods were used to help me deconstruct my background, prior assumptions, and potential power imbalances between the participants and me. These included use of a personal journal and communications with my supervising committee. The personal journal provided me the space to free-write my thoughts. Often these free-flowing texts would form the onset of initial memos. The journal became a place where I pointedly analyzed my own experiences, assumptions and views, in order to critically assess my interpretations of the data. Getting feedback from my doctoral committee also helped to uncover my own standpoints. When I discussed instances of phenomena expressed within the data, my committee offered resources or theoretical frameworks that opened my vision to new ways of “reading” the data. My hope is that by my disclosing some of these reflections (below), the reader will understand how I was “positioned to see, to know and to understand” (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p.123).

3.6.3 Adequacy of Interpretation

Researchers have incredible decision-making power regarding how and what to report in their descriptions and findings, and these have important consequences for those researched (Luttrell, 2010; Mertens, 2009; Punch, 2002a; Smith, 1999). Research findings impact the way research communities are portrayed and understood, and the services and policies provided as a result (Liebenberg, 2009a; Smith, 1999).

Collaborating meaningfully with participants obliges the researcher to consider their role in co-constructing the research relationship, the generation and interpretation of the data, and the potential impacts of this work (Harper, 1998; Harper, 2002; Liebenberg, 2009a; Mannay, 2010). By doing so, we increase the validity of our work, or the extent to which our knowledge claims reflect the realities of those we study (Daniels, 2006). As Liebenberg (2009a) questions, “If the very basis of our research, that is the questions asked in the research setting, are based in existing

‘knowledge’ formulated by dominant voices, how valid then is the data we analyse, and by extension, the findings of our research?” (p.3).

In this research, the study design, coupled with a purposefully engaged, reciprocal relationship with participants, helped to enhance “the extent to which there [was] mutual construction of meaning (and that construction is explicated) between and among researcher and participants, or coresearchers” (Morrow, 2005, p. 253). I recognize, however, that no one method renders the researcher perfectly inoculated from bias. The research process involved collecting multiple sources of data over at least three meetings with each participant, which provided me the opportunity to clarify with participants their previous comments, to expand upon earlier discussions, and to understand their perspectives more deeply. Reciprocity with youth over multiple sessions also gave space for participant checks of my interpretations. Moreover, theoretical sampling, whereby I returned to six specifically-selected youth to collect new data, permitted me to discuss and confirm with youth my developing theoretical understandings.

In addition to reflection and reciprocity, other techniques were used to heighten the authenticity of the interpretation. These included: tracking my analytical contemplations through the use of memos and conceptual maps; being transparent regarding the data gathering and analysis processes; revealing the methodological and ethical challenges encountered; and debriefing with my supervisor along various stages of the research. Finally, part of showing the adequacy of my interpretation will occur by providing the reader with enough evidence in the findings to support the constructed theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Engaging a reflexive and reciprocal approach with the participants - one that valued them as experts in their own lives - did not hinder my ability to develop or carry out rigorous research (Prosser & Loxley, 2008). Nor did it negate my own methodological and analytical

contributions. “It is the researcher who brings the disciplinary understanding and imagination that makes a sociological study – which may even contradict the truth claims of respondents” (Felstead et al., 2004, p. 119). Positioning reflexivity and reciprocity as an integral part of the research design and process helps cross the divide between data and analysis, thereby producing what Forsyth (2009) calls ‘data-in-analysis,’ where participants identify and explain their practices while performing them.

3.7 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCHER- PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIP, METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.7.1 Reflections on the Researcher-Participant Relationship

The importance of engaging closely, openly and reflectively with participants has been discussed widely (Banks, 2001, 2007; Harper, 1998; Mertens, 2009; Pink, 2001a, 2007b; Stanczak, 2007; Suchar, 1997). The closer the relationship with participants, the more the researcher is exposed to rich and varying interaction settings (Harper, 1979). Throughout the research, I felt a deep sense of respect at participants' honesty and courageousness, and this was renewed each time I re-read their interviews and reflections. Generally the youth spoke of their lives and past challenges with such wisdom and humour. They inspired me. I learned things that will continue to affect the way I see the world. I felt comfortable in my conversations with the participants, and I heard from participants that the feeling was mutual.

Many of the participants had a quick yet laid-back sense of humour that I found both matched my own conversational stride, as well as helped to ease the potential awkwardness of a rigid "question-answer" situation. Gough (1999, as cited in Finlay, 2002), reflected upon his use of humour to interrupt the role of "detached researcher:"

I suppose the use of humour helps to suggest the illusion of 'normal' conversation, with the researcher temporarily colluding as one of the 'lads', albeit in this case one limited to one-line questions and interjections. This particular example could indicate a degree of self-deprecation, perhaps in an effort to reduce power differentials, or perhaps more likely, to create distance between myself and (the maligned) psychologists, hence

appearing liberal or sophisticated (either way attempting to endear myself to the participants) (p. 221).

Gough's (1999) reflections caused me to look deeper at my own conversational patterns. I heard myself tell participants that I live in West Gore (perhaps as a way to show commonality with participants, to position myself as community member, and to decrease power differentials). There is no doubt that participants were also adjusting their responses and communications with me. The *process* of data collection, and the specific equipment utilized, works to socially construct the ways in which participants perform or represent their knowledge to researchers and thus the data produced (Lomax & Casey, 1998; Pink, 2001b). To clarify, social constructionists believe that the ways individuals present themselves are flexible, multiple and are continually renegotiated and performed, depending upon social locations, power structures, cultural scripts, and the specific context (Becker, 1979; Haraway, 1988; Pink, 2001b). Likewise, Goffman (1967) suggested that patterns of interactional behavior (i.e. the glances, gestures and verbal cues individuals use) continually feed into and are fed by interactions with others. How people position themselves in social encounters depends upon what they perceive is appropriate during contact with others, and given the occasion or context. Indeed, even the social and technological methods of collecting data should be considered to play a role in constructing the research process and context, and consequently the data produced (Pink, 2001b).

In their study of the dynamics of participants' creation of visual narratives, Chalfen and his colleagues (2010) found that *what* one says and *how* one says it are significantly structured by knowledge of *who* is being addressed. Moreover, the same participant can produce multiple and blended voices (Chalfen et al., 2010). Lutrell (2010) highlights the concept of ventriloquation, which suggests that we speak with the words and intentions of others in an effort

to make our own meaning. A collaborative and open relationship with participants can help reveal the dialogic, cultural, social and psychological facets (Lutrell, 2010) that are engaged in researcher-participant communication and that affect the ways in which participants respond to researchers and vice versa. These interactions affect the material obtained (Becker, 1979) and the theoretical claims developed (Mertens, 2009).

In this study, the participants' responses to the technologies need to be taken into the analysis. While conducting the DITL filming with four participants, I felt that the participants quickly became accustomed to the experience of being followed around by a video-camera and two researchers, though participants undoubtedly noticed its presence. Lomax and Casey (1998) state that even when participants seem to be ignoring or unaware of the equipment they may be interpreting the situation as one where playing the active state of not paying attention is appropriate.

I found that the varying technologies impacted differently on youths' decisions about how or what to share. For example, one participant, "Jada" was willing to disclose in her interview the overwhelming pressure she felt as a result of worrying about her mom, who continues to struggle with addictions. Jada felt responsible to physically and emotionally look after her younger siblings. She creatively depicted her feelings of anxiety, broken trust, and efforts toward healing, in her photographs. She agreed to be part of the DITL filming. However, on the day of filming, Jada asked me to meet her at a location outside her home. When I asked about coming to meet her at her home another day, she said that she was concerned about her family because they did not want to be filmed, and because she felt it would be too chaotic in the house, especially during dinner time, and she didn't want that filmed. This was the first time filming the DITL (which I have done for the Day in the Life Project, the NRP, and for this

doctoral work) that a participant chose not to show me their home. After reflecting on this, I decided that this was actually a positive thing. Firstly, one of the key benefits of using visual methods is the potential to shift power to the participants. Jada took control and decided which parts of her life she wanted to document using various methods. Secondly, I felt good that Jada was comfortable enough with me to express outwardly why she didn't want her house and family filmed.

Conversely, I also had the experience of conducting the DITL with "Keith." Keith indicated in his reflection interview that he was uncomfortable taking photographs because he wondered what other people might think he was doing if they saw him. During the DITL, however, Keith displayed confidence and was open to me filming everything that occurred throughout the day. He later expressed that he found the filming fun and interesting. Moreover, I was able to see aspects of his family relationships that had not been visible in his photographs or discussed in his initial interview, even after my asking him about his family. To reiterate, not all visual methods elicited the same kinds of openness or responses from all participants.

Pink (2001b) does not consider adaptations in participants' reactions given varying social or research contexts surprising or problematic. She calls all research as constructed representations, and suggests that researchers should highlight the negotiations through which the knowledge produced via various methods is represented. Pink suggests seeing data (for example, video diaries) as processes rather than as products. This will enable investigators to explore the data as cultural representations and embodied performances of negotiated identities. This approach rejects claims to discovering a 'truth'; instead, it seeks to uncover culturally and contextually-embedded 'truths,' and makes us aware that "reality itself is not necessarily visible" (Pink, 2001b, p. 595).

Mannay (2010) states that to address power and communication issues inherent in all research settings, insider/outsider discourses are invaluable because they place the researcher at the centre of knowledge production and dissemination. In my research nobody said, “I feel comfortable talking to you because you are from this community” but many of the youth did tell me about how nervous they feel speaking to people they don’t know, and how they would try to avoid it. Somehow - perhaps because I lived here growing up, or because I moved back, or because I still have some of my Hants County mannerisms and speech patterns - I managed to bypass the label of stranger, even though most of these youth had never seen me before. My perceived community membership may have helped some youth feel comfortable participating in the research. I could relate to many of the debates these young people had with themselves - about finding work, about whether to stay or go, and about how to reconcile academic or career goals within such a context.

Mannay (2010) says that when researchers enter worlds indigenous to themselves, participants may incorrectly assume that the indigenous researcher already understands their experiences. This was certainly true in my research. Sometimes youth would assume I knew the people in their stories, or had already heard of the event they were sharing, and I would have to explain that no, I didn’t know, and could they clarify? In these cases, I took Bolten and her colleagues’ (2001) and Mannay’s (2010) suggestion to confront these taken-for-granted positions by ‘making the familiar strange and the strange familiar,’ by fluidly opening myself up to new understandings and possibilities. Doing research in one’s own community, it turns out, is a fine line between researcher and community member.

Though being perceived as a community member may have helped me obtain richer data from some participants, there were some youth recommended to the project who did not follow

up and contact me after they spoke with the community contact. It could have been that they didn't want to talk to me because I was from the community, or for a whole number of other possible reasons. I am not sure how participants specifically viewed my insider/outsider status, but by keeping a reflection journal I recognized that even though I was an "insider" in many ways, in other ways I was different than many others from the area. As examples: I left the community for 10 years and then returned; and I have only one generation of family living here, whereas many of the youth participants' families have been here for generations. One thing that did become clear was just how diverse the perspectives and experiences were of young people in this area, even within the same historical and geographical context.

3.7.2 Methodological Issues

Working with youth requires project design that is rigorous and accountable yet flexible and creative. I had relatively few technical issues throughout the research, but there were some technical and methodological considerations that can be mentioned.

Due to the sheer amount and types of data gained in my research, extra time was required for analysis. This was especially true for the video-based data. Perhaps one of the greatest strengths of using video in research is also one of the greatest challenges. Video cameras can record even the tiniest minutia of situated social interaction (Cameron et al., 2009; Gillen & Cameron, 2010; Lomax and Casey, 1998; Pink, 2007b), and over time I will be able to re-watch the video data I gathered and analyze it a plethora of ways, but for the moment I had to make decisions about which aspects of the recordings should be given priority. That said, the researcher is *always* required to sift through large amounts of all types of data to make decisions on which analytical directions to take. I also faced the challenge of how to display the video-based data in the thesis, given that it is a traditional mode of dissemination that favours text and

numbers and offers little space for visual imagery. The choice was made to create stills from the video for the purposes of this report, and to show moving and audio video clips where applicable at my defence.

As mentioned previously, some participants elected to take photographs with their own digital cameras and some chose to use the disposable cameras I provided. In general, most participants' photographs were of high quality and clarity. Unfortunately, the quality of the photographs taken with three of the disposable cameras were of poorer quality than the rest. Although participants were given instructions on how to use the digital cameras, in at least two of the occasions the participants forgot to use the flash when capturing images indoors. These participants were offered the opportunity to retake their photographs but declined. In one of these cases, the participant expressed difficulty in thinking about what to photograph. When I developed his photographs, I noticed that there were only four images. Three were of the same blurry image, and the fourth was the practice photo I took when showing him how to use the camera and the flash. He later said, "Yeah, the photography aspect wasn't really my strong suit... Yeah, I was just drawing a blank with the photos. It's just not my strength. But I can talk." He preferred the interview session over taking photographs. The youth did not seem to be dismayed by their photographs, but rather used the opportunity to expand on what the photographs were supposed to show.

Conversely, one of the participants in my study was nearly silent during the initial interview. His disengaged "uh-huhs" and "not sure" answers made me question whether he really wanted to be involved. I was pleasantly surprised during his photo-elicitation interview. He was excited to show me what he had photographed. He had quite obviously contemplated what he wanted to capture before taking the images, which provided insight into activities that no other

youth had captured up to that point. When asked at the end how he felt about the process, he said, “It was really fun. It was good, yeah. I liked taking photos.” The use of visual methods enabled him to participate and express himself in a way that the interview sessions did not. Similarly, some youth were drawn to the creative nature of developing a life-space map, while other youth seemed to find it difficult to think of how to portray visually their thoughts, sometimes reverting back to narrating their responses. These examples demonstrate the utility of employing a variety of methods to capture youths’ differing strengths and interests.

Even though I had filmed DITLs in a number of contexts previously, walking with a video camera inevitably results in shaky film. Sometimes I would stop walking, film, and then run to catch up to the participant. Also, because I was following the participant as they engaged in their daily routines, often the film displayed the participant’s back. Like Hancock and his team (2010), Lau and Didkowsky (2012), and Noland (2006), I found, the question of framing of images to be an important consideration in the DITL video research. The extent to which the wider social environment was captured was determined by me. The research assistants did, however, take observational notes on what was happening outside the view of the camera. Still, it points to the issue that video and photographs can leave us limited in our peripheral vision. As Dant (2004) states, “The rigid boundary of the frame of the recording constantly reminds the viewer of what is out of sight, “off-camera,” that might have a part to play in the action” (p. 57). Becker (1979) believes that contemplation of visual framing should invigorate methodological practice:

... visual materials simply make obvious the difficulties we have with a variety of data. Do we worry because the photographic frame, putting a line around much that is of interest to us, excludes everything else? We should, just as we should worry that a

questionnaire finds out something about what it asks about, and tells us nothing about the rest. Do we worry about the way the relation between the photographer and the people being photographed affects the material we get? We should, just as we should try to understand the effect of the relationship between investigator and the people investigated in participant observations and experiments. Worrying over the difficulties of photographic work can revitalize our thinking about problems of method and epistemology, problems always in danger of being so ritualized that they lose contact with the day-to-day work of social science (Becker, 1979, p. 7-8).

3.7.3 Ethical Considerations

Whenever people let us into the private realms of their lives as friends they implicitly impose on us, and we accept, the obligation of not telling anyone things that will hurt them, but we also know that there are some implicit limits to the waiver of moral denunciation. What are the limits? Nobody knows until they face the situation at hand and construct their meanings and course of action-in anguish (Douglas, 1979, p. 30, as cited in Newkirk, 1996).

Knowledgeable consent: Conducting research in my own community raised a lot of ethical questions for me. Or rather I should say that the ethics were always at the forefront of my mind. Somehow, here in my own community, the need to “get it right” and honor the voices accurately – all of their very different voices – seemed critically important. The way that some of the youth bared their experiences to me was a great honor, but at times left me with trepidations. How could I share what they had confided without telling too much? Some youths’ stories were so pointedly theirs, that I questioned how to discuss them and their accounts accurately without revealing their identities.

Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality is especially problematic in visual research because the data portrays images of the participants or others. To address these issues as best as I could, I did the following: All participants received a copy of all their visual data at the minimum. I blurred the faces of people other than the participants in the photographs. Youth were provided up to six months later to contact me if they changed their mind about anything they had said. Participants were given pseudonyms and some minor alterations were made to identifying information to help conceal the identities of the participants. My focus when writing the findings was to reveal enough of what participants shared to honor their voices and experiences, while monitoring the potential long-term risks associated with their participation (Boothroyd, Stiles, & Best, 2009).

I also followed Boothroyd and his colleagues' (2009) suggestion to focus on 'knowledgeable consent' with participants. For consent to be knowledgeable, there must be reasonable and full disclosure of the purpose, risks, and consequences of providing consent. The person consenting must be able to weigh these risks rationally and communicate a choice to participate. Perceptions of whether youth are vulnerable and dependent or autonomous and competent enough to independently agree to research participation are constantly evolving (Boothroyd et al., 2009; Punch, 2002a). Viewing any child or youth as inherently helpless and in need of safekeeping not only eliminates their right to participate in research on their own terms (Morrow & Richards, 1996), but may potentially cause more harm than protection by silencing youth and excluding them from benefits (Boothroyd et al., 2009).

Gatekeepers: Individuals, organizations and institutional policies have the power to limit or provide access to participants. Contact persons, schools, and community advisors were relied upon to recommend participants to the study. Their recommendations influenced the type of

youth recruited, the kind of information provided to the researcher, and thus the sociological and psychological understandings derived from the research (Banks, 2001; Scheyvens, Nowak & Scheyvens, 2003). Undoubtedly local notions of appropriate behaviour in specific contexts played a role in filtering participation (Hall et al., 2007; Luttrell, 2010).

Contextually-situated ethics: I agree with Liebenberg and Ungar (2011) that what constitutes good ethical practice differs significantly based on socio-political contexts, local ethical expectations, and the developmental level and living situation of the participants. However, currently few exemplars, benchmarks or guidelines are provided in the literature about how to engage with these factors prior to and during the research process (Boothroyd et al., 2009; Leyshon, 2002; Prosser & Loxley, 2008; Scheyvens, Scheyvens & Murray, 2003). There were occasions when I needed to make decisions in the field based on specific cases and settings. For example, I had anticipated filming the youth DITLs on a weekend, as we had in the NRP. However, youth were often working or going to school full-time during the week, and then working part time on the weekends. Conducting this research with youth who were so busy required flexibility, ingenuity and sensitivity to their situations. In some cases I filmed over the course of two days, on days selected by the youth. Given that youth were told they could arrange and portray their *days* however they liked, this was a compromise I needed to make in order to adjust to the complexities, strains, and commitments in the youths' lives.

Researchers have a responsibility to acknowledge accurately, adjust to and represent the complexity and fluidity of the lives of those who take part in their studies, taking care not to sensationalize (Daniels, 2006; Morrow & Richards, 1996). It is also our ethical obligation to be cognizant of contextually appropriate modes for dissemination that “uses stake-holder generated, interpretive means to arrive at results and further use of the findings” (Mertens, 2009, p. 309).

When participants are seen as collaborative informants and data collection is directed toward helping participants achieve personal and community objectives, rather than as way of obtaining information away from communities to be analyzed by ‘experts’, the ethical agenda also shifts (Mertens, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2005; Pink 2001a).

The upcoming chapter (Chapter 4) is the first of three Findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6). Each Findings chapter builds on the information presented in the previous chapter. Chapter 4 focuses on the conditions that participants described as adverse in rural Shore Central Hants County. It examines the way youth perceive the transformations occurring in their communities, and what they interpret as risk. The youth-identified risks form the basis for understanding the adaptive processes engaged by participants, as well as the substantive theory of rural youth resilience, discussed in Chapter 5. The theoretical model is foundational to explaining the patterned variations found in youths’ migration intentions and responses to the developmental threats in their shifting rural contexts. The clustered differences in youths’ routes to resilience are detailed in Chapter 6 and are demonstrated using case examples.

CHAPTER 4 YOUTH-IDENTIFIED RISKS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study, I examined the diverse routes to resilience for youth living in rural contexts undergoing social, economic and environmental shifts. Most participants were not only dealing with the effects of rural restructuring, but also with a myriad of other personal, family, and community challenges. In this chapter, I explore the critical issues confronting youths' positive development in rural Hants County. As discussed in section 4.2, youth cited changes in the area's socio-economic conditions, transformations in employment options, long and dangerous commutes to work, the loss of services and stores in their rural communities, limited recreational facilities, and the systemic disregard of rural people and places as the key threats facing them.

4.2 YOUTH-IDENTIFIED RISKS

The risks youth participants said they encounter in rural Shore Central Hants County echo those detailed in the Literature Review (Chapter 2). Youth also spoke about other past and present adversities, ranging from: family addiction and neglect; personal struggles with drugs and alcohol; family loss and serious health conditions; significant financial strain; homelessness; social and separation anxiety; teen parenthood; unemployment, and being the brunt of bullying, among other critical stressors. Their stories are interwoven into the findings presented over the next three chapters. I focus this section, however, on the difficulties associated with restructuring in rural areas.

4.2.1 Youth-identified Shifts in the Local Context

Youth described changes in both the kinds and availability of work in their communities. They demonstrated a move away from locally-accessible, resource-based work to low-wage, part-time and gendered service positions, such as being a cashier at a corner store. The service positions were reported as minimally available, forcing youth to compete with adults for local jobs. As Hannah said, “Once all the little businesses are [taken], there’s no other jobs. A lot of them have their full time people that work there every day, so there’s no jobs for anyone else.”

Young men found it harder to gain first-time employment in the area because, as both male and female participants argued, most service positions are offered to women. While young women were more likely to be hired for babysitting and service positions, young men were more likely to track down odd jobs, help on farms, or work in the woods for their first jobs. Keith explained, “It is harder for a guy to get a job out here because, I mean, the [stores] only hire girls...[Guys] either get a job at the garage, which there is only like one person that works there

at the counter. Or travel. Or don't have a job." Caroline said, "I don't know. They're racist against guys or something. There's nothing really for you to do, unless you like ask to mow lawns for people."

Youth stated that there is little diversification in the employment options available, and there are few *career* opportunities. They used examples of shut-downs in local businesses, like the peat-bog, sawmill, fisheries, forestry operations and century-old family farms, to support their observations of an impoverished occupational context. They spoke of family members losing their jobs and as Camden said, having to "adapt and start going to the city or wherever to find new forms of work." James highlighted the strain for youth who stay in their rural locales created from the decline in services and businesses, and the increased out-migration of young people. He lamented, "We used to have three stores. We used to have gas stations. We used to have a home hardware shop...And another thing, who are my friends in the community now?" Chris' photograph (Figure 2) is a stark reminder of an employment option that used to be, as he recalled, "booming" but is now "one of the main jobs in the community that shut down." He remembered going to the abandoned space to ride his pedal bikes with friends when he was younger.



Figure 2 Chris' photo of abandoned sawmill.

Camden spoke about the reasons his family's farm shut-down, which exemplified the effects restructuring government policies have at community and family levels:

People who run farms now have 500 to 600 head of cattle, where we had 50...There is no way you can [compete]. We didn't have any technology. It was all pretty old equipment and we just couldn't keep up because quota kept going up [and] we didn't have the money to grow and expand...Family-owned places are going out of business. My uncle actually sold his farm, same thing, probably four years ago.

4.2.2 Transportation Risks and Dislocation from Resources

Youth reported that transportation is the most significant challenge of living rurally. They said they must commute to urban areas for a variety of work, educational and other resources, because their rural environments do not provide provisions to meet each of their needs. They indicated daily mobility presents a considerable safety risk, and especially emphasized the poor winter road conditions (See Megan's, Hannah's and Elise's photographs, Figures 3, 4, and 5 respectively). Most had stories of losing peers in road accidents, coming upon car crashes, or of 'totalling' their own cars. Jada said that one road-accident where she was first on the scene continued to haunt her. A young woman Jada's age fell asleep coming home from work and hit an oncoming car carrying a woman and two children. Jada recalled, "When I got there I knew she wasn't going to make it [because] she wasn't breathing or responding...I found it hard at first. Like a couple of days afterward that's all I saw, like in my head, when I drive, 'cause it was just an accident and it could happen to anyone."



Figure 3 Megan's drive.



Figure 4 Hannah's drive.



Figure 5 Elise's drive.

Youth said that without a vehicle or the financial resources to travel, youth depend on other people or miss out on work, recreational and educational opportunities. Andrew recalled, “The hardest thing when I was a kid was not seeing your friends that often.” Hannah included a photograph of her car tire (Figure 6), “to show that I have my own vehicle, so I don't have to depend on anyone to get myself to work or where I need to go. But there are also other people out here who can't afford or who don't have vehicles. So it's a challenge for them to try and get somewhere.”



Figure 6 Hannah's car tire.

Participants with vehicles communicated the high financial and time costs of traveling so often:

Jack: I got a job moving stuff in [the city], a 50 minute drive...for \$10 an hr! You drive there every single day and then it just doesn't seem like you have a whole lot left over once you get paid... [People] are doing what they got to do to make ends meet.

James: Every time the gas light is on, you gotta think, I hope I make it there in time.

Hannah: [Driving is] an extra two hours on my day. Just travelling. So if I work a twelve-hour shift, it's really a fourteen-hour shift. Plus the gas isn't cheap.

Transportation is a critical rural conundrum because, as Jada put it, "You need to buy a car before you can have a job, because you can't get to a job with a car." The inequitable distribution of public transportation services leaves rural youth without adequate options for taking part, further marginalizing them. Elise explained the consequences of having no public transport options: "There are things that you don't get here like you would get in the city, like public transportation. There's a lot more drinking and driving around here compared to anywhere else because you [can't] call a cab."

4.2.3 The Experience of Rural Disregard

Some youth expressed frustration that rural people and concerns are misunderstood and de-prioritized by the government. They used examples like the poor state of the roads, the non-existent public transportation system, policies that further impoverish rural areas, and practices like fracking, to show systemic disregard toward rural areas.

Camden: The way they are expanding the cities, I don't think they are really interested in people staying out around here...They put all the money in there, and it took us 15 to 16 years to get a road paved...[In the city] there's more economic chance for the government to get their hand in there. The more money they can profit off of it, so who cares about the little man?

James (See Figures 7 and 8): I am always thinking about potholes. You try to miss them, but you can't. I wish the government would fix these, but they [don't]. 'Round here, it's like, why in the hell is it still like this?...I think the government thinks about us as only small people around the communities...I would like to talk to the government face to face [to] show them these pictures and say, listen, you are our government as well. One thing I always see is work done in the city. I don't see any work done in the country. I would like to see these roads done.



Figure 7 James' photo 1 of potholes.



Figure 8 James' photo 2 of potholes.

Megan spoke out against the fracking occurring in her community. A highly controversial practice, fracking involves drilling into the earth and under high pressure, injecting water and chemicals into the drill-point to force gas to surface. Megan explained tests for fracking left two

ponds uncovered, which are now leaking radioactive brine into the soil. She fears for the health of family, friends, pets and wild animals:

[Fracking] is a big issue that I'm really involved with...I mean, it's scary!...I think it is more of an issue where we are a rural community, because we don't really have a population that is significant enough for them to care more, I guess...I feel like they kind of look at us like we are less educated and they don't feel like they need to answer to us as much...It is kind of overwhelming. It's sad. Sometimes you feel like you can't do anything.

The youth in this study were acutely aware of the challenges presented by remaining in or returning to their rural communities. Their migration decisions were occurring in tandem with other life-course transitions, against the backdrop of broader community change. How do some youth navigate the risks of living rurally? Who stays, who goes, and why? In the next chapter, I present a social constructionist grounded theory that conceptually links youths' relationships with their rural places with the kinds of positive adaptations they make and their decisions about where to live.

CHAPTER 5 A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF RURAL YOUTH RESILIENCE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study, I examined youths' pathways to resilience as they coped with the significant social, economic, and environmental transitions associated with rural restructuring. In the face of burdened circumstances, I found that some youth intended to continue living rurally, while others intended to out-migrate. Using social constructionist grounded theory, a theoretical framework was constructed to explain differences in youths' relationships with their rural places, which in turn helped interpret youths' migration intentions and variations in their pathways to resilience. As explained in the methodology chapter, my analytical approach focussed on how young people constructed meaning from their encounters within their ecologies. I took Ungar's (2011) advice that a contextually-relevant understanding of youth resilience should first examine the nature of youths' social and physical ecologies, attend to the processes occurring between youth and their environments, and lastly explore youth strengths.

I begin in section 5.2 with a brief overview of the substantive theory and the conceptual propositions developed out of the current research findings. The substantive theory is comprised of three core components: the quality of the youth-place relationship; the viability and availability of certain adaptation responses, given the structural constraints or opportunities in youths' rural environments; and the selection and use of various pathways to resilience.

The first component, expounded upon in section 5.3, reviews the core category of youth-place compatibility, which refers to the quality of fit between youth and their rural places. In this section, I examine the structures, supports and resources in youths' rural places, and bring to light youths' interactions within their communities in relation to their: educational and career

pathways; secure points of reference and subjectivities; recreational and lifestyle interests; and their community relationships and sense of place. To end the section, I show that youths' constructions of the compatibilities and incompatibilities between themselves and the resilience-promoting resources available within their rural places depend upon their previous encounters, current conditions and timing, and the value they place on certain needs, aspirations and responsibilities.

In the second substantive theory component, discussed in section 5.4, I point to the ways structural constraints and disadvantages within youths' rural environments overwhelm some youths' capacity to draw on the resources and supports necessary to overcome the cumulative threats to their positive development. I show that the tensions between structure and personal agency affect the meanings youth make concerning the viability of potential actions, which further hinders or enables youths' positive development.

The resilience processes youth used are explained in section 5.5. Participants adjusted to the challenges produced by deterioration in the rural economic base by: being mobile to access employment resources elsewhere; intending to live here but work there; preparing to leave; living off the land; and/or embracing family and/or community-support systems. Four clusters of youth-place relationships were identified. Youth associated with each group expressed patterned differences in their use of positive adaptations to overcome the developmental threats produced by rural restructuring. These clusters are unraveled in Chapter 6.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY

In the upcoming pages, I provide evidence from youths' experiences in rural Atlantic Canada to support the following theoretical propositions:

- When youths' rural environments enable them to use available resources and supports to meet a variety of educational, occupational, recreational, social, emotional security, and identity needs and aspirations, they are more likely to characterize their rural places in a positive light. In turn, when they characterize their rural places in a positive light, they are more likely to intend to stay living rurally and to utilize a combination of in-situ and mobility processes to respond to the pressures produced by rural restructuring. These adaptation processes consequently bolster the compatibility of the relationship between youth and their rural places.
- When youths' social and structural environments are unresponsive, restrictive, or fail to offer the kinds of resources and opportunities required to nourish youths' most-valued needs and aspirations, youth are more likely to emphasize the incompatibilities between themselves and their rural places. These youth are more likely to intend to leave and use a combination of adjustment processes in preparation for out-migration. However, they make this decision *only when* they believe they can garner the social, psychological and financial resources that make leaving a viable and preferable strategy to overcoming the challenges faced in their rural locales.
- Youth whose rural place- relationships comprise numerous and significant incompatibilities, thus presenting risks to youths' positive development, yet who face structural and personal barriers that restrict them from building or mobilizing migration-

resources, are less likely to view out-migration as a possibility for improving their circumstances. Instead, incompatible yet familiar conditions are portrayed as more secure and viable than leaving.

In other words, I suggest that youths' compatible and incompatible relationships with their rural places shape the kinds of adjustment processes available to and selected by youth in the face of challenging circumstances, and these youth-place relationships help explain their migration and mobility orientations. However, youths' intentions and scope for taking action are concurrently mediated by the social, economic, and personal barriers and opportunities structured by their environments.

In order to support the theoretical propositions outlined above, I will now explain the substantive theory in more detail. The substantive theory is comprised of three core components: (a) youth-place compatibility; (b) the development, viability and availability of certain adaptation responses to the risks associated with rural restructuring; and (c) the selection and use of various resilience processes that protect against the risks associated with rural restructuring and the problem of youth-place incompatibility. Each of these theoretical components is examined and substantiated using quotes and images from participants.

5.3 YOUTH-PLACE COMPATIBILITY: THE QUALITY OF FIT BETWEEN YOUTH AND THEIR RURAL PLACES

Analysis of the data showed a pattern that I termed youth-place compatibility. Youth-place compatibility is about the quality of fit between youth and their rural places. This core category was constructed through an analysis of: (a) the compatibility of the structures, services, community dynamics and opportunities offered by youths' rural environments, in relation to their personal and collective orientations, needs, and goals; and (b) how youth make meaning from, and then characterize, their relationships with and within their rural places. A young person's relationship with the place they live is formed through their complex interactions with people, spaces, objects and structures in and outside their rural communities. In the next four sub-sections, I explore the constraining and enabling environmental conditions that were found to play a role in structuring the developmental options available to participants. The environmental conditions are related to four areas participants emphasized as integral to their wellbeing in transitioning contexts: (a) educational and career pathways (discussed in section 5.3.1); (b) secure points of reference and subjectivities (detailed in section 5.3.2); (c) recreational and lifestyle opportunities (as discussed in section 5.3.3); and (d) community relationships and sense of place (see section 5.3.4). Following these sections, in 5.3.5, I illustrate that youths' constructions of self, place and the compatibility between the two, were influenced by their previous encounters, current conditions and timing, and the weighted value of certain goals and responsibilities. These core concepts are delineated in a model of youth-place compatibility, shown in Figure 38.

5.3.1 Educational and Career Orientations, Networks and Influences

Following high school, questions of where to live, whether to go to college, and what “to do” for work were at the forefront of participants’ minds. The three statements below, from Jack, Chris and Megan, exemplified the tensions many participants felt as they made vital life-course decisions:

Jack: When you get to the age when you want to work and have a job, it’s a lot more difficult [around here]. That’s kind of the big decision I guess. It can be really hard on you. You want to get a job. Like, you gotta make sacrifices I guess to go get a job.

Chris: [Leaving high school] was a lot more emotional than I thought. I was just thinking, right on, graduated, everyone does this! But right when you get ready to go down the hall and I got my best buddy beside me, it just all hits you. You couldn’t wipe the smile off my face, I was so excited. And yet I didn’t want to leave.

Megan: [My biggest life challenge was] definitely learning where I wanted my life to go and how I was going to have a life here and still have a career. After high school, I kind of went to university and then I decided not to go back. Deciding what I was going to do and how I was going to live here, and go to school and have a career [was scary]...I knew I wanted to be close to home. I never really wanted to live in the city. Just kind of being scared, wondering, well do I have to live in the city? Is it ever going to be possible for me to live out here and still have a career?

The scarcity of occupational opportunities disadvantaged all participants, but the features of youths’ rural places better fostered entry into certain kinds of career paths, which were maximized by some youth. Other youth were unable, or chose not to, make use of the career-

supports based in their rural places. These youth either floundered to find work locally or strategically looked to educational and career resources, supports, and opportunities outside their rural places.

Types of educational and work pathways: The post-secondary schooling programs and work pathways participants took ranged from administration, trades, medical and health care, and farming, to animal care, community services, and academic sciences (See Table 1). Sixteen of the 19 participants were college or university-educated, or were in the process of earning a degree. All participants who completed post-secondary education had full-time positions in their fields of interest. Of the youth studying in post-secondary institutions, three had part-time service or farming positions in their rural communities. The youth not enrolled in post-secondary programs included: Lydia, who worked as a cashier and on her family farm and hoped to study pharmacology; Caroline, who had a part-time service position in her community, and was upgrading some high school classes with the intention of studying in an animal care field; and James, who was unemployed but taking a government-funded course that assists individuals to find employment. The educational and occupational pathways generated by many of the youth in this study were counter to the predominant discourse that rural youth need to move away to enjoy successful careers.

Historical, spatial, and technological factors enabling school and work access: Several historical, spatial, and technological factors made it possible for participants to remain living rurally while obtaining a degree or participating in the labour market. First, 18 of the participants owned their own car. Second, advances in communication and computer technologies, such as the Internet, provided youth connection to resources previously considered inaccessible. They were able to take online classes, obtain library resources from a distance, email papers to

professors, and connect with other students. During her *day in the life* video recording, Helen was videotaped using multiple technological mediums simultaneously while she completed her schoolwork. Jennifer, who primarily did her schoolwork from home, stated, “I have my resources. I have school and I have my Internet. All I have to do is put money on the computer and it gives me books.” Still, Jennifer noted that internet access is a privilege not afforded to everyone in Hants County. She explained, “We just got high speed a year and a half. So it’s still very new to us. And some people still can’t connect off the tower.” Thirdly, the physical location of Shore Central, Hants County made it possible to reach areas in which many of the province’s post-secondary educational institutions and career opportunities were located in approximately one hour. If these towns were much further away, perhaps travelling daily would not be considered as feasible.

Work-entries, networks, supports and critical junctures: Youth involved in trades, some health care fields, administration and farming expressed appreciation for the kinds of career-supports accessible within their rural communities. Most of these youth were initiated into their lines of work by family or community members, who also provided them with opportunities for work terms and longer-term employment. Camden, for example, told me he came from a long line of electricians. He said, “Well, my grandfather used to be [an electrician] [and] all my uncles were electricians too, so it was kind of in the family.” A community member with a company offered Camden work before high school ended. This was a critical juncture in Camden’s career-path decision-making. Camden said, “I’d been talking to [Bart] when I was younger, and he kinda said that if I ever got into the trade that he’d hire me on.” He reported that as soon as his course ended, “[Bart] hired me on. There are probably 20 or 30 guys from around here who are employed by him.” Other youth involved in trades, farming and health care professions noted

similar work-entry experiences. Chris for example, was offered a job by a family member in construction before finishing high school. Chris said, “All through grade 12, I planned on being a plumber for some reason...But an older buddy of mine took the [construction] course and said, geeze you might as well take it. Why not? I could work with my [family member who] wanted me to go work with him. He was like, well, the jobs there. I love it! It’s the best decision I ever made.”

Jada, who studied and worked in a health care profession, spent time in health care facilities as a child with her mother and grandmother. Jada explained, “My mom and my grandmother worked [in health care] in [town] and so I would spend all day with my grandmother and then stay through the shift change and come home with my mom. So I was there a lot.” Jada’s proximal family relationships were available for her to glean career support. She also had the benefit of a supportive community dynamic that connected her to social and financial resources that fostered her career potential. For example, a high school teacher alerted Jada to a scholarship opportunity offered by a local businessman. Jada wrote a letter explaining her financial need and a family member helped edit it. Jada wrote about her experiences caring for her siblings while her mom struggled with addictions. She spoke about her desire to work in a caring profession and help others in her community. She talked about her volunteer work in the community. She said, “It felt good going up on the stage to receive it, being [one of only five] girls in [my] graduating class...I almost threw up waiting.” The community benefactor was so moved by Jada’s story that he and his wife invited Jada and her family to visit them. Over the years, this community connection remained a meaningful influence in Jada’s life. Her account shows the intersection of several facilitative personal and community factors. She was positively engaged in community life; she had the support of community advocates; and even though she

considered herself “not a very good writer,” she took initiative to vie for valued opportunities offered within her rural place.

Youth involved in health care professions, farming, and trade-work emphasized the importance of fit between their skills and those required in their occupations. They spoke of their competence in conducting practical, skilled, and hands-on work. Rob, who studied farm management and worked on a local farm, commented, “I’m a hands-on learner. That’s how I learn how to work on the farm so well, because I can keep on doing it every day, and it just sticks in your head.” Camden asserted, “I’m more of a hands-on learner than in the classroom anyway, so [a trade is] good that way.” Youth suggested that having the opportunity to “try on” various careers helped them determine if their interests and aptitudes matched the occupational requirements. Eddie, for example, discovered he loved plumbing in a high school co-op course: “I was in a program called O2, which is Options and Opportunities. It gives you an opportunity to go on a co-op, and see what you want to do. I went out with them and I loved it, and I did all four of my co-ops with different plumbing companies.”

Youth involved in other occupations, like corrections, academia, sciences or medical systems fields, were more likely to describe an incompatibility between their interests and capacities and the career paths more readily generated within their rural communities. These youth were less likely, compared to those youth interested in trades, farming, health care and administration, to know family or community members in their fields. Their career choices were inspired through forces both external and internal to those lived or witnessed in their communities. Hannah, for example, said her interest in the fields of criminology and human services was piqued through watching forensic and policing shows on television. Access to globalized media opened her eyes to alternative career options. When asked if there was anyone

she knew in her field of interest, Hannah remarked, “No, a lot of my family has been in nursing. [A family member] who was kind of a role model growing up, she was a nurse, and I was around her a lot, so that was kind of always in my head. I’m going to be a nurse. Now as I get older, I don’t know if that’s right for me. [Criminology and human services] just stuck out to me.”

Hannah’s career role model was her boyfriend, who worked in legal aid in another province. She said, “He’s always there when I need someone. He’s just so dedicated and hardworking. When he has to do something he makes sure it gets done, and that he done the best that he can. He makes sure that he shows people that when he’s at work, he wants to be there.”

These youth also attested to the importance of finding careers that were “right for them.” Perhaps because they traversed paths less traveled, they were more likely than youth interested in trades, farming and certain health care fields to take time after high school to contemplate their career directions and “make a plan.” Hannah informed me that the time off between high school and university was instrumental, because she gained self-awareness, made vital decisions, and developed a plan, which she then put into action. She stated, “I wasn’t quite sure [after high school]...So I took a year off when I graduated and just worked and tried to figure out what to do. Then I went to the community college...I did that for a year and then I moved on [to criminology and human services].”

A conflict between career type and place?: When career pathways relative to youths’ interests were less available locally, some youth intended to migrate toward the options, opportunities, and supports offered outside of their rural places. Hannah, for example, told me her career dreams were unlikely to be fulfilled in her rural area because, “There are no jobs around here. I mean, there’s a few, but not in my career path. I knew that I was going to have to travel.” She contrasted her local environment with the facilitative conditions she felt existed

elsewhere by saying, “I just think the bigger cities or towns have more options, even for jobs, while you are at school or part time.” She discussed out-migrating as an inevitability and spoke of a quality education and career as something actualized elsewhere. She noted that even in high school, her community lacked quality options to support educational and career development:

I have always wanted to get away from here. Even when I was in high school I thought about transferring to [another school]. I don't feel there are as many opportunities here as there are at many other high schools. My boyfriend comes home from [a town], so he went to [a] pretty big school, and he's telling me some of the classes they had in high school. Those options were never here. It was just the basics and that was it.

Similarly, Andrew believed his educational and career path would eventually take him away from his rural community. He was about to start classes at university, and had a multitude of occupational curiosities. His contemplations about the future abounded with the excitement of self-discovery and appeared completely unrestricted by attachments to place:

Sometimes I think I do [know what I want to do] and then sometimes...I realize I don't really know what I want to do with my life. It changes every day. But I would like [to be a] chiropractor. I like physiotherapy or something along those lines. I like that but who knows, maybe I'll find something else of interest. Maybe I'll be a researcher. I want to take sciences because I love chemistry and biology and it leaves the most doors open for me if I want to go the science way. Like a couple of my friends took kinesiology, but I am just going to stick with sciences - it's just leaving me more options.

Youth with career passions more readily compatible with the provisions and networks available in their rural contexts, and who wanted to remain rural, described their situations as

fortuitous. Rob, aged 18, took photographs of farming equipment (See Figures 9 and 10) to symbolize his love for farming. He said, “Farming has changed my life because it is just something I love to do, and it is one of the only jobs really available around here.”

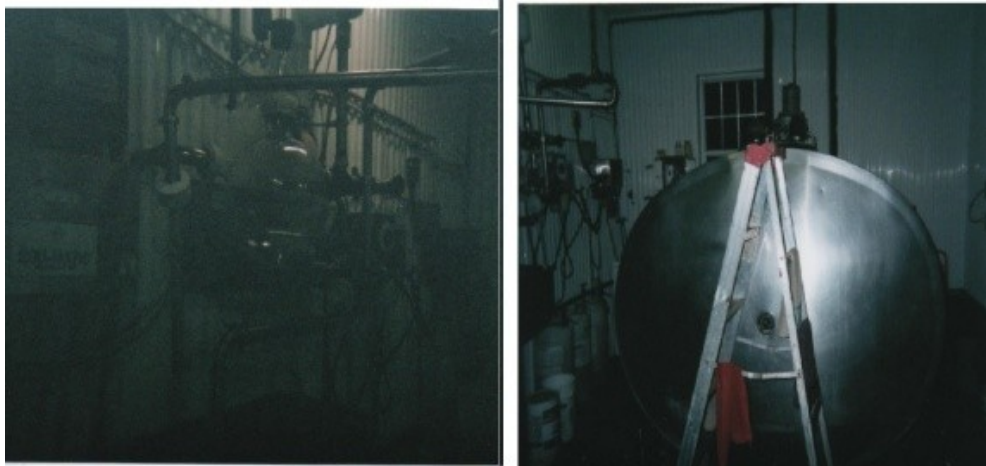


Figure 9 Rob’s photo 1 of farm equipment. Figure 10 Rob’s photo 2 of farm equipment.

It was youth with career interests less common in their rural areas, but who nonetheless wanted to remain in their rural places, for whom career decision-making caused significant internal conflicts. Tara’s case provides an example because she reworked her career intentions based on her attachment to her rural place. After high school, Tara was drawn to a visual arts career because, “I wanted a career where I was happy.” She studied visual arts in an urban area located an hour from her rural location. The images below (See Figures 11 and 12) were taken for class projects, and show her incredible talent. Tara finished her course, then left the province to continue her education in visual arts. After a week, she emotionally could not continue. Her parents worried for her wellbeing, so her father drove to her school and brought her home. According to Tara, it was the most difficult time in her life, because it prompted the realization that her career aspirations would not be easily compatible with her desire to live in her rural community:

I [left Nova Scotia] in September to go back to school and ended up leaving and coming home. It wasn't anything like what they had said...So I didn't feel that I was going to benefit from it. And I was really, really homesick ... And then I just kind of decided I needed a new career path, because [that career] is just not going to get me what I need to be successful I guess. Not just in the money, but just enough to make a living here.

In order to resolve the seeming conflict between career and residential aspirations, Tara rerouted her career path significantly. She started studying mechanical engineering in a location that allowed her to live at home and commute to school. Her partner, who studied a related trade, inspired her new career interest. Tara shared that although this work was not her first passion, she found it interesting, and more importantly, it allowed her to meet her most-valued residential, family, and lifestyle priorities. She did not intend to give up visual arts completely but aimed to, “have a job that I actually enjoy that I want to go to work to everyday and I always want to do visual arts on the side.” Tara's example was illustrative of the youth-place conflict-resolution process I titled ‘weighting values.’ As youth engaged their meaning-making systems to determine their compatibility with the features present in their rural places, some values, relationships and goals were prioritized, while others were devalued in comparison.



Figure 11 Tara's photo 1 taken for class Figure 12 Tara's photo 2 taken for class project.
project.

Not all youth were able—or enabled—to strategically utilize and maintain career supports and opportunities either inside or outside their rural communities. James, for example, differed considerably from many of the other participants in the kinds of challenges and barriers he faced to find employment. The dismal work context in rural Hants County made it extremely difficult to find a job locally. Poverty and limited resources to fix his car confounded the possibility of traveling outside the community for work. His early childhood experiences with his father, a learning challenge, explosive anger, homelessness, fights with community members, panic attacks, heavy drinking, and a number of other endangerments to his positive development made it difficult to maintain employment once he was hired. James' recalled getting fired from his job: “Well I used to have a job working but I fucked up...Well, this boss, she thinks she knows it all and thinks she can...be just like Dad...Very strict and everything else...I was like, listen here, you sound like my father! Get the fuck away from me!”

Community members offered James a number of opportunities to improve his financial situation. Tim, who owned a business fixing and selling used cars, allowed James to pay off a car

purchase in exchange for volunteering. James said, “I always go over to [Tim’s] place and help him out. He always tells me, get me a ball joint, or this...so I help him [in order] to pay things off, like the car that I have.” James was actively trying to improve his life chances and find employment. He explained, “I am trying to make my life up, and get going again. [People in the community] told me to get some help and everything and that’s why I am in the [employment] program. I love it!.. Hopefully I will get a job after this program is done, and then get my car fixed.” James was pleased to be receiving \$9 an hour to attend a government-funded employment program, where he learned resume-building, work-place, and anger-management skills. He declared, “Now I am thinking more, ok, I’m going to school. I am going to make money. I am making new friends. I am going to have a girlfriend too, and make my own life again...Now it is my turn to make [my] life.” A few months after our last interview, I learned that James was hired moving rock at a quarry in the area. Unfortunately, not long after this, I heard that he lost this job and was struggling with extreme emotional, financial, and physical hardship. Despite these barriers to his positive development, James did not intend to leave his rural place, which I discuss further in section 5.4.

The post-secondary schooling programs and work pathways participants took, as well as their community supports and critical influencers are summarized on the following page in Table 1.

Table 1 Youths' career aspirations, networks and critical junctures.

Pseudonym	Education after High School completion	Career (Current or Aspirations)	After High School	Work Access, Networks, Supports	Critical Junctures/ Influences
Camden	Electrical	Electrician	School (drove)	Community-network	Offered job before end of high school
Tace	Electrical	Electrician	School (moved)	Through school, family	Opportunity to try it with family members
Megan	Complimentary health care	Complimentary health care	School (moved)	Own path	Left university to return home; Took time for self-discovery
Tara	Mechanical engineering (current) Visual arts (previously)	Mechanical engineering (current) Visual arts on the side	School (moved)	Own path (previously) Community network (currently)	Left university to return home; Took time for self-discovery
Jennifer	Administration (current)	Unemployed Administration (aspiration)	Moved	None yet; Unemployed	Became pregnant
Lydia	Wants to return to school for pharmacy	Service (current)	Work (drove)	Family	Mom helped her find job
Jada	Health care field	Health care field	School (drove)	Family	Early childhood experiences; Scholarship Family income-level
Jack	Electrical	Electrician	Waited 1 yr before going to college, then drove	Community-network	Watched others
Chris	Construction field	Construction	School (drove)	Family	Offered job before end of high school
Eddie	Plumbing	Plumber	School (drove)	School network	Scholarship; Opportunities and Options high school course; Family income-level
James	Government-funded employment program (current)	Unemployed Car repair (aspiration)	Searching for job	None yet; Unemployed	Anger issues; Lost job; Problems in family; Homelessness; Learning challenges; Education
Martin	Gas-fitting	Gas-fitter	School (drove)	School network	Just decided
Elise	Administration	Administration	School (moved)	School network	Just decided
Rob	Farm management (current)	Farm hand (current) Farm management (aspiration)	School (moved)	Community	Offered job in community; Teen father; Family income-level

Table 1 Continued.

Pseudonym	Education after High School completion	Career (Current or Aspirations)	After High School	Work Access, Networks, Supports	Critical Junctures/ Influences
Keith	Pipe fitter (current)	Towing company (current) Pipe fitter (aspiration)	Took 2 years off school to work and determine educational directions	Community	Waited; Just decided; Money motivating factor
Hannah	Human services	Human services field	Took 1 year before leaving for school	Own path	Left home; TV forensics program; Family member
Caroline	Upgrading high school courses (current)	Service (current) Animal care (aspiration)	Took 1 year to upgrade, work, and determine educational directions	Own path	Interest; Love for animals
Helen	Health systems field (current)	Service (current) Health systems field (aspiration)	Took 1 year to work and determine educational directions	Own path	Waited; Just decided
Andrew	Sciences (current)	Uncertain	Took 6 months off before school	Own path	Waited; Explored options

5.3.2 Subjectivities and Secure Points of Reference

Youths' stories revealed that feeling emotionally, physically, and financially secure played a stabilizing role as they dealt with major coming-of-age decisions and socioeconomic shifts within their communities. Data analysis showed that youth bolstered their emotional, physical, and financial security by: positioning self in relation to family bonds; emotionally connecting with the notion of home; identifying as rural; and orienting to careers as secure points of reference. Some sources of secure identifications were portrayed as rooted in their rural communities, while others were not.

Positioning self in relation to secure family bonds: Some youth said their family relationships were the primary reason they remained in or returned to their rural communities. Others went further still by expressing their sense of self, personal strengths, and futures as embedded in their family relationships, which were in turn discussed as rooted in their rural places. This relationship between family, self, and sense of place was distinctly depicted on Lydia's life space map (Figure 13). She made her family the centre of her 'world', with all connections, community relationships, responsibilities, opportunities, and positive aspects of living rurally branching out from her family. She said:

Mainly it starts with family, and since my family is all from around here, farming.

Because my Grampy owns the farm and he lives here, so he picked a good area where we have a lot of woodsy areas and a whole whack of nature around...And work would be in the family too, because my mom got me the job [as a cashier], plus working on [our] farm. School would be in with the family as well [because] I probably wouldn't have made it through [high]school if I didn't have help from my grandmother and my mom. So I think like mostly everything is connected to family.

Camden used his photographs to visually portray how his family roots from past and present are firmly entrenched in this location. For him, sense of place and family history help him understand where he comes from and thus *who he is*. He stated, “All my family is [here]. They always have been. I don’t really have any interest to go anywhere else.” He used a photograph of his home (Figure 14) to show, “This is the house where I grew up my whole life. I thought that had a pretty big role in the way I see things. My grandfather actually built the house.”

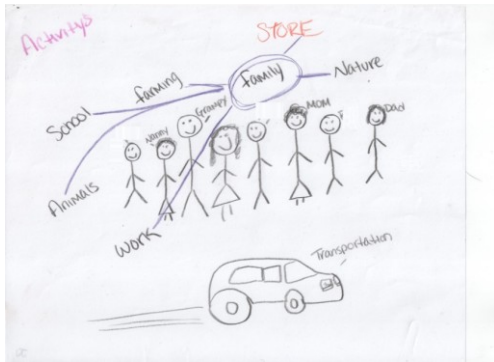


Figure 13 Lydia’s life space map.



Figure 14 Camden’s house.

The continuous, proximal presence of family instilled feelings of security to youth who positioned their self-representations in relation to their family bonds.

Chris: Family is the biggest thing in my life...Some people have their best friends. My best friends are more so my parents...I have a real close connection with my mother and my step-father. They have always been there.

Megan: I like being able to see [my parents] every day. I don’t know what I would do if I couldn’t see them every day.

Jada: [I want to stay] because my family is here...We are all close...When you see [accidents] happen so quickly, I like seeing my family every day. Like my grandfather calls me every night or morning and we talk.

Loss and trauma—and then repair and recovery—appeared to influence the ways some youth forged strong connections with their rural places and the people in them. Grandparents emerged as significant players in almost all of the youths’ families, but especially in families experiencing financial strain, addiction, or other major strife. The insecurities developed from family upset, such as those described by participants with parents recovering from addictions, combined with the security and sense of connection built through relationships with grandparents and other family members, seemed to intensify youths’ positive bonds within their rural places. An example comes from Jennifer. During the life-space map portion of the research (See Figure 15), I asked Jennifer which experiences helped make her who she is. She wrote the words “Separation” and “Loss,” and explained that:

Family loss is connected to, or actually caused a lot of, the separation issues. And I don’t mean just Dad, cause that’s what a lot of people would have thought. My father left before I was born and came back when I was five and left again and came back and left and came back and left and came back and then at eighteen he came back and at twenty-one he left again.

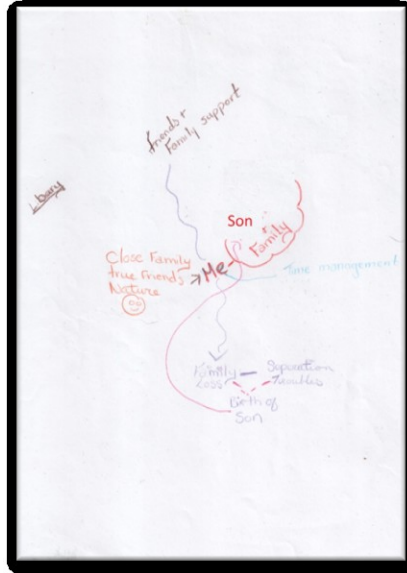


Figure 15 Jennifer's life space map.

In grade one, Jennifer's separation anxiety was so debilitating that her grandmother sat with her in the classroom every day. Jennifer remembered that it was her grandmother's presence that helped her get through school:

Just little by little she kept leaving and coming back, leaving and coming back. So that I would know she was there. And that really helped a lot. And that was one of the things that I hated about myself. I hated that. How silly can a person be? But it's not. And now that I have grown up I realize that, you know, that really changed who I am. Because if it wasn't for that I wouldn't be as strong as I am. And I wouldn't have the respect and the love that I have for my grandparents.

In her interview, Jennifer emphasized her need to nurture the secure bonds in her life. Her strong relationship with her grandparents, son and partner, helped her begin to rebuild a sense of emotional safety after many losses. She said firmly, "I have amazing family. I have a close-knit family. There is nothing—no money in the world, nobody—that could take away what I have

now and I don't know what I would do if they did. I don't know if they could, because I would fight tooth and nail for it.”

The complex intermingling between security-maintaining and insecurity-avoiding emerged not only from youth reporting family trauma. Megan, for example, said that her family has always been her secure point of reference. She had a career she enjoyed, owned her own home with her partner, and felt positive about her life. Yet she said worry is part of the reason she stays living close to her family. She stated, “I don't like to be far from [my family]. I think we worry about each other a lot. I just like to be close to them...I always think, how much time do I have left? I need to spend as much time as I can while I have everyone so close.”

Several youth articulated deep feelings of responsibility toward contributing to the wellbeing of their families. Their relationships were interdependent and complex: youth simultaneously gained support and nurture from families that enabled them to mobilize essential resilience-promoting resources and build their personal capacities. At the same time, these youths felt heightened responsibility to remain close and reciprocate care with their kin. Lydia for example, said, “It is kind of hard to just up and leave when you still have responsibilities on the farm and everything. I could if I wanted, move out to the city close to work and stuff like that but I'm not much of a city person anyway...I want to continue on the farm and keep that going. My grandparents said that when I get older I can have this house or whatever. I would feel homesick if I left. I would miss my whole area here. And my grandparents, because they wouldn't be beside me. And my brother. My family.”

Similarly, Jada emphasized helping her family as core to her feeling secure. She stated she would probably never leave her rural place because being close to her family was so important to her. She provided insight into why helping played such a prominent function in her

security-striving. She confided, “My mom has [addictions] and stuff so that’s probably where it started mostly.” She explained, “I grew up a lot faster than I should have...Well, pretty much caring for the home and my brother and sister and making sure they were getting ready for school and bathed and a lot of the stuff that is the parent’s job.” Jada asserted that these challenges strengthened her capacity to do things for herself. She said, “I don’t regret it or wish it could have been different. I probably did at the time wish it could be different. I’m glad I was brought up that way in a sense, because I can kind of do stuff on my own.”

Family members who overcame significant hardship were highly regarded by youth because they were seen as an inspiration that difficult times can be survived and a better life forged with persistence, good decisions, support and a positive attitude. Lydia was particularly proud of her mom for overcoming her addictions. She said, “I saw my mom. She was going through rough times. She is a very strong woman today...She doesn’t touch any drugs, and she hasn’t had a drink in like 15 years...So I learned that, that even though you go through tough times, I just look at my mom and she went through one of the hardest things [and] she is living life like never before.”

Emotionally connecting with the notion of home: Narratives of the warmth and comfort of home were prominent in some youths’ data. For these youth, home symbolically pointed to deep feelings of emotional connection and identification with place. As Chris told me, “This is where the home is. I’d have a hard time getting away. [It is an emotional connection] big time.” These youth took photographs symbolizing their valued relationships with their rural places. Camden, for example, commented about his photograph depicted in Figure 16: “That’s just up here at [The Hill]. It kind of represents the whole community where I grew up. It’s kind of why I want to stay

around here. I just enjoy it...[And] that's just the sign going [into my community]. It kind of shows that it's the heart of everything and the heart of Hants County.”



Figure 16 Camden's photo on The Hill.

A number of youths' photos showed safe places in their rural communities. Eddie, for example, included a photograph (Figure 17) of his grandparents' abandoned home, which he said brought back special childhood memories. He pointed to the photo when asked what he does when facing major challenges, and explained, "I definitely go for a drive and sometimes I stop off at this house and go in there...Just walking around, remembering what it was like to be there." For James, Tara and Camden, as well as a number of other youth, The Hill overlooking Hants County held emotional significance. For them, this place marked meaningful life transitions and positive former experiences. Tara said that being on The Hill (See Figure 18) reminded her of bonding with her mother. It also signified the point at which she could see her community when driving home, which invoked feelings of community appreciation and comfort. She explained, "It's looking down over [my community]. It's almost kind of like when I come over that hill, I know I am almost home 'cause I can see the church and stuff, so it's kind of an important spot...[to] know that I am that close to home." James reported that he goes to The Hill because it brought back good memories being there with family. He said, "This is my only thinking spot...Sometimes I go up there and think about, what is my life going to be next?"



Figure 17 Eddie's grandparent's home.



Figure 18 Tara's photo of The Hill.

Some youth explained that feelings of comfort and familiarity in their rural places helped them feel *in place*. They contrasted these feelings with the imagined discomfort of learning new systems in other places. Jack revealed, “[I stay because of] comfort. [It’s] familiar. I like it. I just like to kinda stay around with my friends. I know a lot of my friends live in town and I can go see them and party in town and stuff, but I don’t know. I just feel comfortable here I guess.”

When asked more questions about the link between familiarity and place, he clarified, “If I had to go to town or go anywhere on the Metro bus I’d be screwed. Anyone in there it would be like second nature really. You get off a bus onto another bus [but] that’s scary to me...I think it would be uncomfortable. I’d be like, I’m going to screw this up. It’s going to take me to Gottingen Street! I’m done for!” Lydia also pointed to the role of familiarity in youths’ relationships with their rural places. When asked what young people need in order to grow up well in Hants County, she replied:

Social skills...because there’s a lot of people around here who are shy. You grow up with all of these people that you know. Then once you get out there and there are all of these people that you don’t know who are totally different than people are down here. So I think you got to have a little bit of both worlds. It’s good to go out to the city and stuff like that so you are comfortable in both settings. You warm up to it eventually. But at

first of course you are going to feel uncomfortable. You are going to feel like, I don't think I should be here.

Jack and Lydia's comments again pointed to the complex intersections between security and insecurity in youths' place-relationships. Some youth formed strong, secure bonds with their rural places that served as protection to tumultuous socioeconomic forces, and these connections were all the more heightened by the imagined insecurity of venturing into unfamiliar and unsettling places.

Other youth, however, depicted ambivalent feelings about the notion of home. Keith, for example, showed a disconnect between his sense of security and his rural place. He told me that if he had one wish for his community, it would be to make it feel safer, "the way it used to be." I asked whether there was something that happened to make him feel that way and he recalled his house getting broken into when he was a child. He added, "But [vandalism and breaks-ins] just keep happening and happening. Just random acts going on."

Identifying as rural: Many participants indicated that living rurally is a good fit for them because they are, as Tara and Tace called themselves respectively, a "country girl" or "country boy." Those youth described rural people as strong, hands-on, self-reliant and physically capable. Jennifer, for example, said that one of her strengths was her, "ability to do just about anything. Whether it be physically or mentally." She added, "I am sure you can relate to this, [but] not too long ago the gyproc was falling down in the ceiling in our living room and I fixed it. Because you can. You grew up and knew that they just cut this so it must work. You just figure it out! And you are able to do that."

These youth depicted rural people as honest, polite and genuine. Eddie said, “Well, you are pretty much raised right [in a rural area], right?...[Good values means] honesty, truthfulness, trustability. I know there’s some people around here that you can’t trust, but most people are real trustworthy and good people.” To them, strong work ethic meant getting what you work for. As Eddie told me, “Just, learning how to work, how to earn what you get is a pretty big thing. Not having it given to you, like a lot of city people. I mean a lot of them don’t have a lot. But a lot of them turn to crime when that happens, not trying to work.”

Rural people were portrayed as willing to fight for what they care about, especially when it comes to their families or their community’s values. Chris stated, “If someone is going to come at me with something, I’m not going to be one that’s just going to take what they are saying. I’m not afraid to speak my mind...I’ve been raised that way pretty much. I was taught to always speak my mind no matter who it is with, and don’t be afraid of no one.”

Youth who strongly identified as rural contrasted their self-concept with what they typified as a “city person.” The imagined city person portrayed values and skills oppositional to those held by a country girl or boy. Thus, mental pictures of *who they are not*, were part of youths’ representations of *who they are*. Jennifer said:

I believe a lot of city folk think, ‘Oh you are just country, well what do you know about that?’ Well I had to learn all that...Don’t be scared to try anything. And if you fail, try gain...But it’s not [like that] in the city. You just go to school... Because if something needs done in their house, what do they do? They call their landlord or they call a carpenter to come fix it.

Camden said he had positive experiences being labeled a “country boy” working in the city. He reported, “You get called a country boy. Nothing really too bad. You hear it.” I asked him how that made him feel. He replied, “I enjoy it ‘cause it’s never really in a negative way. Especially in construction. Like “oh, you are a country boy, you’re a hard worker.” Which is good, because I *am* [a hard worker] and I enjoy it and it’s a good thing to hear. It’s never really such a negative thing.”

This discursive work around a positive rural identity revealed a magnification of the perceived differences between the worldviews and lives of rural and urban people. The ease of city life was contrasted to the challenges of rural life. Youths’ photographs showed hard work as part of everyday life. Martin, for example, presented photos of himself fixing his tractor and helping his dad fix their well (Figures 19 and 20).



Figure 19 Martin helping his Dad.



Figure 20 Martin fixing the well.

The resourcefulness required to practically use and adapt objects, plants and materials in response to their limited access to certain resources within their rural places, to benefit one’s circumstances and overcome hardships, was argued to heighten particular personal and collective strengths. Transition, risk and coping were suggested to be constant elements in their lives and in

the lives of generations before them. As Jennifer said, “We are used to not having everything at our fingertips.” She added, “[My biggest strength is] my ability to cope with just about anything...I think that, too, comes from growing up out here. Because you know, everybody goes through tough times in their life and everybody deals with them differently.” Jack made the case that adaptation is a regular part of rural life:

It’s almost like it’s not hard [living rurally], you just have to change sort of...You just got to adapt. To the length of time it takes to do things...Like if it’s snowing, you need to get up early to go to work that morning. You got to drive an hour and its shitty. And their [city] roads are plowed right away. I’d like to see someone from the city drive from my house to the [Campbell corner] at five in the morning after a snow-storm. It probably wouldn’t happen...Say you live in [town]...you’d be accustomed to everything just being good to go.

Work-based identities and points of security: Not all subjectivities and security references were discussed as attached to their rural places. Some youth when asked to speak about themselves, focussed primarily on their school or career intentions, and their strengths relating to these. They indicated that a good career is essential to a secure and successful future, as opposed to other youth, who pointed to their rural places as security references. Hannah is an example of someone who cultivated a sense of self in relation to her career aspirations. She pinpointed a thriving career as integral to overcoming the structural disadvantages of her rural place. For the photo-elicitation portion of the research, she included images representing her school and career paths. One showed her proudly looking through a wooden cut-out of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (See Figure 21). She indicated this was her favorite photo because, “It looks real, you know what I mean? I could picture myself doing that.” Hannah also showed a

photograph of her graduating from high school because, “School obviously gave me the education to move on.” In one fell swoop, Hannah discursively situated an education as laying the groundwork for success, while constructing opportunities as emerging through “moving on.”



Figure 21 Hannah and the RCMP.

Rob distinctly positioned his self-concept in relation to his work. He suggested an inseparable connection between work, place, security-striving and identity. He said, referring to Figure 22, “[I wanted this picture] just to show what made me the person I am, living in a rural area. Farms are a big part of a rural area.” Next, Rob indicated that work is a source of protection for him in his rural community because, “It’s everyday work. It’s keeping you out of trouble. I’m not running the roads, hanging out with the people I shouldn’t [and] all of that stuff.” He articulated that farm work concurrently influenced his developmental pathways, while allowing him to nurture the development of others. He explained, “It just shows how one little thing can change your life. You bottle-feed them, you bucket feed them, you start feeding them grain, hay, you literally help them grow up, like raising a kid. It symbolizes, like farming, you are literally raising a family. It’s a small little calf that turns into a 1500 pound animal. I’m a Dad now, so [raising a family] is very important to me.” Rob’s narrative so expressively brings to light that work and place-based identities may entwine, thereby offering multi-fold protection in stark

socio-economic contexts. In his case, work kept him out of trouble and allowed him to provide for his newborn child.



Figure 22 Rob's photo of a calf.

The people, places, and self-understandings youth associated with their rural places were considered grounding forces in tumultuous conditions or core drivers of tenuous relationships between youth and place.

5.3.3 Recreational and Lifestyle Opportunities Shaped by Natural and Built Environments

Youths' rural communities were found to differentially foster and suit certain kinds of lifestyle and recreational pursuits. The options and opportunities presented to youth within their rural locations affected the ways youth made use of, engaged within, and understood their rural places.

Strongly orienting to the natural world: Youths' proximity to the wilderness was touted as a community asset, but was viewed differently by the various participants. Some youth expressed a strong appreciation of the natural spaces abundant within their rural areas. They portrayed their relationships with and within natural environments as having overlapping and mutually reinforcing benefits that are relational, educational, financial, social/recreational,

emotional, physical, and aesthetic. Photographs showed activities like playing outside and working together to gather resources from the environment (e.g. firewood). Tace for example, explained using his photo, Figure 23, “This is the picture of the woodpile. That’s the way of life out here. Everybody burns it.” Jennifer articulated, “When we get wood in the summertime, it’s my grandfather, my grandmother, me, [my son], and usually whoever else wants to help out. And we just go. It might take a day, it might take two months. Whatever. We just take our time and do it. It’s just something that we can all do together.” Youth called this “living off the land” or a “rural way of life.” Living off the land enabled youth to contribute to their personal and family financial and physical wellbeing despite challenging socioeconomic circumstances. I therefore detail this resilience process further in section 5.5.



Figure 23 Tace’s woodpile.

Youth who emphasized their strong connection to nature argued that time spent outside fostered an appreciation for the seasonal patterns. As Tace told me, “You see a lot of stuff that you would never see anywhere else. There’s so much wildlife. It looks different every season, so you never see the same thing twice.” Megan included a series of wildlife photographs (See Figures 24, 25 and 26). She said about her images, “This is the [turtle] that me and mom rescued

that was up by the bridge. And then we have skunk. It was just a baby last year and it didn't spray yet so we kept feeding it cat food."



Figure 24 Megan's photo of duck pond.



Figure 25 Megan's photo of turtle.



Figure 26 Megan's photo of skunk.

Similarly, Lydia (speaking of Figure 27) said, "This one is a plus of growing up in the woods, 'cause you got animals coming right up to your porch and everything...He was taking things right out of my hand."



Figure 27 Lydia's photo of raccoon.

Youth recognized the dangers presented by living surrounded by the wilderness, such as the possibility of being stalked by coyotes, but expressed more fear of threat by humans than by animals. Rob explained this thought:

[Rural living] is hard sometimes but the benefits are better than the problems. You are not just staying in your apartment because you are scared someone will mug you if you go out. Here you can be walking at 1 o'clock in the morning and you'll feel safe. The only thing you'll be worried about are the coyotes. But that's what the knife in your pocket is for...People have killed more people than animals have. And if an animal does hurt you, it's because they are scared or you are trespassing on their land.

Youth who oriented positively to the natural world suggested a distinct link between their positive emotional wellbeing and accessing natural spaces. They spoke of being alone outside, decompressing after being in the city, and relaxing in the tranquil environment they typified as characteristic of their communities. Having access to natural spaces helped them cope and reflect on their problems. Camden said, "I'm outside more than [inside]. If I make it home before dark I am usually in the woods doing something...It's just freedom. There's no one there. I just enjoy nature." Lydia informed, "When you are out there in the fresh air and you are working, everything just clears your mind and you are in the zone. And [then] everything else is fine."

Mixed orientations to the natural world: Alternatively, some youth took photographs of natural spaces to represent the positive *and* negative aspects of rural living. Hannah provided a photograph of hay bales (Figure 28), which showed that, "In the country you have a lot of space. But I guess it could be a challenge too, for the weather for them maybe if it's dry." These youth expressed concern about wild animal dangers, and stated this safety risk decreased the amount of time they spent in the woods. Caroline said about Figure 29, "I love living in the country

[because] you have your own privacy. You're not so close to your neighbours. This picture also represents the woods. They scare me at times, because of the wildlife out here. If [I] were to walk outside alone, [I would be] afraid of different animals. Coyotes and bears." Hannah showed me Figure 30: "There is a lot of wildlife out here [which is] sometimes a concern for some people, that have kids, or if you are walking, or even dogs and stuff. Whereas in the city, you don't really come across that very much. Coyotes [are] a big issue [and] like my dog just got porcupined the other day."



Figure 28 Hannah's photo of haybales.



Figure 29 Caroline's photo of winter.



Figure 30 Hannah's photo of a racoon.

Recreational opportunities and social sites: Youth who enjoyed spending time in natural spaces were more apt to find their rural environments suited their recreational preferences.

Favorite past-times included outdoor adventures like hiking, swimming, fishing, and kayaking. Youth also spoke about combining outdoor excursions on all-terrain vehicles with social interaction, such as going four-wheeling, snow-mobiling, or ‘muddin’ (driving trucks, four-wheelers or old cars through large, wet and sloppy mud-holes) with friends. Martin explained ‘muddin’ like this: “[My friends] usually like to work on trucks and go muddin’ and stuff like that. Four-wheeling. Get covered in mud...You just find the biggest hole you can and hit it!” All-terrain vehicles were featured in young men *and* women’s photographs. Chris explained that purchasing one (See Figure 31) was a right-of-passage for him:

That there is the new bike I just got this year. It’s an expensive investment, but the funnest and biggest bill I had...it was also a bigger step in my life because it was the first really big expense that I had to spend. And I’m paying for it all myself. Monthly payments for so long, so it’s a big step to take really.



Figure 31 Chris’ four-wheeler.

Differences were uncovered, however, in the capacity of youths’ rural places to respond to varying recreational and social interests. Youth with a lower inclination toward spending time in the wilderness were less pleased with the options provided in their rural areas. Though they still spent time outside, they spoke of a shift occurring in their recreational preferences. Keith for

example recalled going sliding “[at our neighbour’s hill] every winter.” When I asked if he still enjoyed being outside he answered, “I did when I was a kid.” Youth with recreational interests not catered to by their rural places (like movies, shopping or bowling) emphasized the paucity of recreational and social opportunities in their rural communities. In Caroline’s interview, she repeatedly stated, “There is nowhere to go,” and “There is nothing to do.” These youth spent more of their free time driving to areas where their interests could be met. Helen noted her favorite past-times with friends involved liking to “hang out and go shopping, go to movies all the time” and Caroline said, “We usually just drive around, I dunno we’ll drive to [the closest town] just for something to do. There’s not really much to do out here.”

All youth expressed frustration about the lack of varying recreational options available in their rural communities. *All* youth pointed to the lack of public social spaces, restaurants, open community hubs, and sports facilities. Some youth, like Elise, said she and her friends created social events in their homes, where they played board games, played pool, or held potlucks, to connect with one another (See Figures 32, 33 and 34).



Figure 32 Board game.



Figure 33 Elise’s pool table.



Figure 34 Potluck.

Jack explained that youth had to “make their own fun.” Other young people, like Keith, made clear, “Unless there is a party going on, usually I sit around and do nothing.” Participants argued that adults’ recreational concerns were prioritized over youths.’ Youths’ attempts at

community improvement left them feeling tokenized by adults. Hannah reported, “No one is initiating anything for youth. For kids who don’t play sports there’s nothing.” Likewise, Chris said, “You got no place to go. Even if [the community could] open the gym for even two nights a week for an hour. The kids that aren’t the kids that make the team, can come out for something to do. That’s going to change them around from not going and stealing stuff.” Tara spoke about her time as a youth representative on [a county development committee]:

They were trying to figure out what to do to keep youth here out of trouble, because a lot of youth here are troubled. I think a big thing is that there is nothing for anybody to do. You look at the community and surrounding communities, you have to travel at least 45 minutes to get to anything. We tried to get a skating rink in and that was a no go. There were funds but they were more so concerned about keeping the older people happy than the younger people...I wasn’t heard at all. They basically wanted me there to tell the government that they had a youth representative.

With limited public social spaces and “things to do,” youth stated they used their cars as social sites. Camden said he and his friends get together and, “Listen to music, talk, laugh, [and] drive all around the back roads.” Chris called his car a “community centre on wheels” and Caroline commented that a store parking lot was a central hang-out spot. She stated, “The cars. Sometimes you’ll see six cars lined up. There’s nothing else to do.” Youth contended that with no public transportation system, no place to go, and limited police monitoring, drinking and driving was common. As Jack revealed, “You can go get in a truck and drive. No one will bother us...There is a lot less cops around to stop people from driving around, drinking and partying, doing whatever they want. There’s a lot of drinking and driving around here. I don’t think it’s a secret...Everybody has done it.”

The built environment (space versus distance): Overwhelmingly, participants said the physical space afforded to each person was a community asset. Youth spoke about both the community set-up (i.e., the physical distance between houses) and the relational benefits these settings produced (i.e., the increased privacy between neighbours). Rob for one reckoned that the distance between houses made for better community relationships when he said, “The freedom of having so much space around you [is a benefit]. That you’re not all clumped together but you are still a strong community.”

The word “freedom” was used repeatedly used in conjunction with the words “space” and “privacy.” Space invoked feelings of freedom from outside pressures to conform, because youth could enticingly “do what they want.” Chris said, “Oh I love it. You are secluded, no one ever bothers you.” Likewise, Martin explained the best part about his rural place was, “You can do what you want without other people bothering you.” Jack comically stressed all of the things he felt he was free to do in his rural place that would be a problem in more urban areas:

I always liked it in [the city], but I couldn’t live there. The atmosphere was fun but, it would get old pretty quick. [It’s] so congested! I can wake up and go in my back yard and pee if I want.. If you pulled that in the city, it’s going to catch up to you!...Just the freedom. I can go out there and do anything...Summertime, I don’t even pee in here.

The spatial properties of their rural ecologies provided opportunities for exploration, excitement, and contentedness, due to the absence of domination from the rules associated with urban areas. Some youth noted, however, that despite enjoying the extra space around them, it only produced the sense of freedom when combined with the power of having a car. Otherwise, living rurally without transportation caused confinement and isolation. As Jada expressed, “You definitely need transportation. Like even when my car is in the garage, I worry, because what if I

need to go here or what if I need to go there?” These youth described space as beneficial *and* challenging, because it dislocated them further from essential wellbeing resources unavailable in their communities. Keith for example, stated, “Well you have a lot of space around you, but everything else is just spaced right out. It’s not like the city where everything is packed and cluttered [but] you can just walk around and meet new people.”

5.3.4 Relationships with Others and Sense of Place

Youths’ characterizations of their rural places had much to do with their interactions and affiliations with others living there. The statement “Everyone knows everyone” was said by *every* youth participant, and, therefore, became an important in-vivo code linked to what some youth like most—and some youth like least—about their rural communities. Youths’ experiences with others in their rural places brought to light the way feeling *in or out of place* is intimately connected with the *politics of place*.

Everyone knowing everyone as a positive phenomenon: Talk of community life was portrayed as extremely positive by some youth. Their accounts were filled with experiences of receiving care, encouragement and assistance from their community members. Elise, for example, recalled the night her family’s house flooded when the river crested and they lost all of their belongings. Her outlook on life changed that night, as she realized that through adversity, the support of her community was with her:

[Losing our house] helped me realize that materialistic stuff isn’t as important. And it made me realize how amazing the people in our community are because everybody came together. Like one man just gave us \$500 the next day so we could get some clothes and

stuff. Like it was *absolutely* amazing to see the community...It made me realize that people are wow, people are awesome!

When asked to think about a challenge he faced and how he coped with it, Camden remembered the shock he felt when learning his mother had a life-threatening illness. He indicated the key role his community played in helping his family: “[When my mom got sick], the support around here when that happened! ... Everyone did whatever they could and that was good. They had the benefit at [a] hall and [it was] full to capacity and there were people outside. I don’t think that would happen in town.” Camden depicted the cooperation in his rural community as unique in comparison to other—especially urban—places. Everyone knowing everyone connected youth to various networks of emotional, physical, and financial support. As previously mentioned, Camden was one youth who mobilized his community relationships to find work. He said, “It’s all about who you know, really, and in a small community you get to know everyone.”

These youth said that knowing everyone and liking them promoted strong community bonds and a sense of intergenerational camaraderie. Community members were described as “nice”, “helpful,” and “polite,” and a reason to stay living in their rural places. Martin reported, “I will always live out here my whole life because I know everybody and my friends are all around here.” These youth described their communities as tight-knit, and aligned their self-representations in *likeness* with other community members, based on the values believed to be exemplified and shared between themselves and others:

Eddie: I think it’s a nice little place. Everybody knows everybody, and everybody is pretty much friends...We’re all pretty good folks and whatnot.

Jack: A lot of people have a lot in common. Everybody seems to get along.

Elise: You know everybody. That's a big thing. Like I graduated with like 50 people and I could tell you not just everybody in my graduating class' name. I could tell you their brother, first, last name, possibly middle name, interesting facts about them...It was just like, everybody gets along so well. That was cool.

Everyone knowing everyone as a negative phenomenon: Not all accounts of community experiences were positive. Youth with community or peer relationships fraught with discontent or who had been the brunt of community gossip (for example), were more likely to express the pitfalls of everyone knowing everyone. Caroline, for example, spoke of the pain she bottled inside during emotional mistreatment by her high school boyfriend. He prevented her from maintaining relationships with her friends and failed to protect her when his friends started a rumour about her. She recalled, "When I was in school, my ex-boyfriend [Billy], his friends told everyone [terrible lies about me]. I never really told [my family]. I just kept it to myself I guess." Billy started dating a another woman, and this woman began spreading—and still continues to spread—hurtful rumours about Caroline throughout the community. On her life-space map (Figure 35), Caroline spelled the word 'rumours', and drew a small person with a mega-phone saying, 'blah blah'. Caroline said, "My ex-boyfriend, he lives with this other girl now...She's gross. She talks about me a lot I guess...I just try to ignore it. She just wants somebody to talk with. My friends know who I am. Everyone knows it's not true." Even though Caroline has close relationships with people in the community, and insisted that "everyone knows it's not true," she still explained that, "it gets around to everyone, whether it's true or not."



Figure 35 Caroline's life space map.

Caroline's negative community experiences seemed to affect how she characterized her rural place. Throughout her interview, she used the term "drama" to describe her community. She contrasted her perceptions of her rural community with depictions of other places, based on her travel experiences elsewhere. Other places were portrayed using words like, "nice," "friendly people," "no drama," and "very different from here." Feelings developed from her experiences occurring in and out of her rural place consequently became part of the way Caroline imbued her location with positive and negative meaning.

Like Caroline, Hannah also said she had a few close friends in her community, though most had moved away. She too said, "[My biggest challenges were] people at school and bullying and that sort of stuff." She told me, "[When I got older] obviously I knew how to handle it better. But you see some of the kids today, I don't know how people can deal with it. I think coming from the smaller community, everyone knows everyone so they all had something to say." She linked living in a rural community, being bullied, and knowing everyone, with escalating harm via community gossip. She speculated that people who started rumours or

bullied others did so out of “jealousy or something, I think.” She noted that gossiping was common community practice, especially among older women. She said, “You just got to learn to ignore it...My friends and family [helped get me through it], and I just learned that it’s not worth it. I’m better than them, if that’s all they have to do is talk about me.” It appeared that in an effort to protect her valued sense of self, Hannah discursively distanced herself from behaviours constructed as common in her community.

Another issue raised with everyone knowing everyone, was that due to the area’s small population and limited in-migration rates, limited options were available for building new (or diverse) local friendships. Caroline said that this could make the friendships youth do have stronger. But Keith argued that since there is little hope of meeting someone new locally, he doubted ever securing an emotional connection with peers within his rural setting. He told me, “I suppose if you didn’t really fit in it would kind of suck, because you already know everybody and you wouldn’t get the chance to meet someone new or if you didn’t fit in with the little people you are already surrounded with.” His description of what he enjoyed about growing up in this rural area was also what he doesn’t like now: “I like that I knew everyone that I grew up with. We all grew up together. You know your whole graduating class and stuff like that.” But he explained that he grew apart from his community peers because his values diverged from the view and behaviours he perceived as dominant and entrenched in his rural place:

Keith: They are just their own kind of people, in my opinion.

Nora: Different like?

Keith: ‘Cause once you move out or get a job in other places you see what people from other areas are like. It’s really different.

Nora: What kind of people would you say that they are?

Keith: I call them sheltered people. Not saying that everybody is like that. Well, most people graduated with 400-500 people and I graduated with 30 to 40 people. And [you are] stuck from primary to 12, so if you don't fit in with them...

Keith's life space map starkly showed the isolation he feels (See Figure 36). It illustrated the complexity in what youth find compatible or incompatible between themselves and their rural places. Keith liked the space offered by his rural area, yet wished there were more resources and things to do, so that "maybe more people would come." He compared his rural experience with the opportunities he thought were available elsewhere, saying, "But it wouldn't be like this in the city where you can always move around groups and meet new people. You don't have any chance to do that here." When I asked Keith whether he participates in the community, he indicated no interest to do so, and expressed ambivalence toward building relationships with community members. He said, "I don't know to be honest, because I don't know what program would interest me in general, let alone to do with the community." He did not spontaneously, nor when prompted, reveal anyone in his community he would turn to for support in times of adversity.

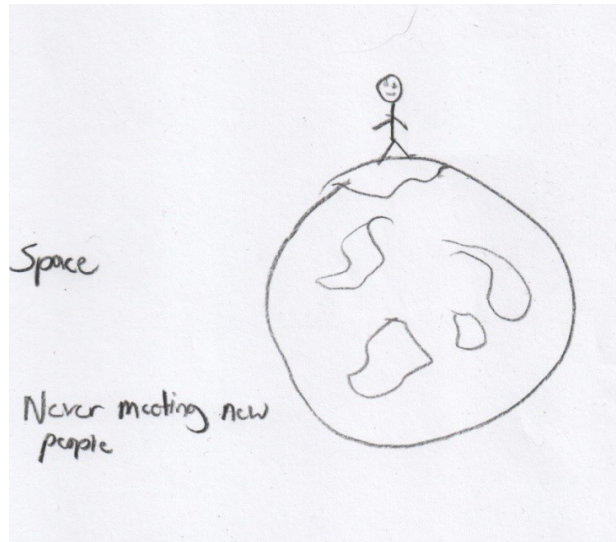


Figure 36 Keith's life space map.

Connecting sense of place with the politics of place: Everyone knowing everyone, informal community monitoring and the discursive practice of gossiping were three highly intertwined conceptual codes constructed from the data. Community information, both good and bad, and whether true or not, passes from person to person with ease and speed.

Youth who viewed everyone knowing everyone as a positive phenomenon were more likely to describe these practices as chatting or catching up on community news. They noted that taking the time to stop and talk with others is an inclusive and intergenerational practice that connects young people to their communities and forges for them a *sense of place*. Perhaps Tace portrayed this relationship most succinctly when he said, “You know what is going on so you are never out of place.” Youth highlighted the use of public spaces, like the gas station or the corner store, as community hubs. Elise, for example, drew a line between a coffee cup, the words ‘everyone knows everyone’ and ‘the store and gas station’ on her life space map (See Figure 37). She explained, “Everyone would hang out every morning [before the cafe shut down]. [Now] if you go to the store on Saturday morning at 8 o’clock, there’s all these men sitting there drinking

coffee, asking why are you up so early. Everyone knows everyone, [so we] can hang out and gossip.”

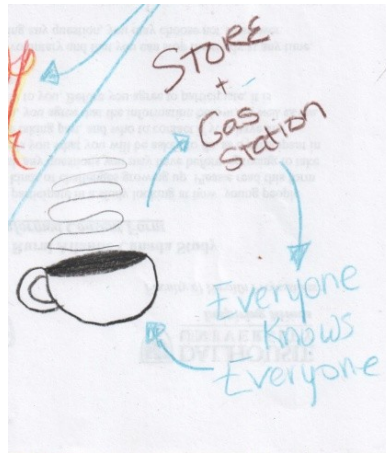


Figure 37 Elise’s life-space map.

Like Elise, Camden described the sense of community connection fostered through intergenerational interactions:

See that’s kind of nice, to know all ages...There’s kind of a crew that go down [to the garage] there in the mornings for coffee. They just get coffee and shoot the shit or whatever... I usually go down for a coffee in the morning and get my gas...There’s not really a lot of people my age that go...I usually go and listen to a little bit of the information and then leave. There’s usually a story or two...Oh yeah, there’s not too much that gets away from [the older people in the community]!

Indeed, youth indicated that to be considered a community member, and by doing so acquire the benefits associated with community belonging, one should socialize or take part in some way. However, socializing can be challenging in a rural location where practically no formal social spaces exist, and one needs to be highly motivated to seek out interpersonal

contact. Regardless, youth said they must reciprocate the positive behaviors expected of them and others: respectfulness, friendliness, and helpfulness. Camden informed, “[You can usually tell who is part of the community] by the way they talk. You can usually tell within the first few minutes what their views are, know what I mean? It’s usually just the faces you know. And it’s... it’s just the way people out around here act. You can wave at someone out here and you’ll get a wave back. You don’t get flipped off.”

Youth who saw everyone knowing everyone as primarily negative were more likely to speak of the community surveillance and gossip as suffocating and excluding. They felt the need to self-monitor. Worse, they argued it can deter people from getting the medical or mental health support they need. Jada suggested that because “everyone knows everyone” and there is “nothing to do,” community gossiping is a common activity even in professional settings. Jada spoke about her mom’s addictions. She said that there were no addiction support centres locally that she knew of, but that even if there were, it was unlikely her family members would choose to go. She clarified, “I’m not sure if people would [go to an addictions centre] here. Maybe not in this community, because everyone knows everyone.” Jada’s experiences raised an important issue. Even if services are available rurally, community dynamics and concerns over privacy can deter people from using the support systems.

Community practices and conditions were found to reinforce established power dynamics. In other words, youth had to position themselves in certain ways to be considered community members. But youth were not just innocent bystanders; they helped create and continue these patterned relations. Camden, who said he stays because he loves the friendly, positive, down-to-earth vibe of the community, shed light on how community norms are internalized and perpetuated:

Camden: Everyone is friends with everyone. People who aren't from around here, if they come and try to change the norm, we might fight them. There could be controversy between them. I don't know how to explain it.

Nora: What is the norm that you wouldn't want changed?

Camden: Just easy going, like trying to get along with everyone. Don't try to start anything. It just seems like people with a big ego don't go far out around here. It's more or less just the equality that I like. Like nobody has much more than anyone else, but everyone is just happy with what they've got.

Certain behaviours were reported to be quickly shut out. Chris gave an example of a youth his age being ousted metaphorically from the community. Interestingly, both Chris and Camden noted examples of unacceptable behaviour as originating from outside the community:

There's a kid that had moved here from, I don't even know where. He was in my grade and we graduated. He started into thieving and starting stealing from people and stuff, and we got rid of him. We didn't want nothing to do with him. He's bad news...And recently he breaks into the garage in [a nearby community] to steal gas. He got caught.

What happens when youth have negative community experiences but still indicate a strong sense of place?: Though youth tended to emphasize either the positive or negative aspects of everyone knowing everyone, a number of young people noted the complexity of the phenomenon. Some youth experienced the effects of community gossip, bullying or other interpersonal community conflicts in their own lives, and yet continued to align (instead of distance) their self-representations with their rural places or its members. Instead of distancing, these youth responded to their community challenges by: (a) not taking the conflict "to heart";

(b) through processes of self-transformation; or by (c) discursively minimizing the negative intentions of fellow community members who instigated these previous conflicts. These processes are demonstrated through the experiences of Chris, Lydia and Jennifer below.

Chris is an example of youth deciding to not take community gossip and conflicts to heart. He reported that if he could change anything in his environment, it would be, “To have fewer people around who are so worried about what everyone else is doing.” Even though he knows people may talk about him, he responded, “To tell you the truth, I never really worried about what people would think of me. But a lot of kids that I grew up with do and take it to heart what other people think of them. But myself, I know what I think of myself and I don’t care what anyone else has to think, really.” When I asked him where his self-confidence comes from he replied, “Probably my step-father. He pretty well grew up the same way. You don’t worry about what anyone else thinks, you know what you think, kind of thing. It didn’t give me any problems.”

Lydia’s experiences of self-transformation and rebuilding her profile within the community is a good example of another response made by youth with a strong sense of connection to place. Lydia said she was, “going down the wrong road,” binge drinking, partying, and following in the footsteps of her mom, who she now praises for overcoming her addictions. I asked Lydia if she ever felt judged or monitored by her community:

Lydia: Not anymore. When I was younger I kind of did because a lot of parents didn’t like their children coming over here because I was into partying and stuff like that. ‘Oh you shouldn’t hang around her, she’s a bad influence’ and stuff like that. It took me a while actually for people to finally figure out that she’s finally grown out of whatever she was up to.

Nora: How did you do it? What was it you did to make that switch?

Lydia: Well my mom would go and tell everyone, ‘oh Lydia is doing so well and blah blah blah’ and stuff like that. I think a lot on Facebook people kind of saw a change too, like the pictures I was posting and the statuses I was putting up. ‘Cause I felt better, so I would put positive statuses up. So people saw a change in my attitude as well and finally they realized.

The interplay between positive opportunities, reinforcement from her work colleagues, and support from her mother prompted Lydia to redefine herself and gain a different outlook. Interestingly, community monitoring and the interconnected web of people passing information back and forth can put youth on the ‘outside’ of the community, but in Lydia’s case the same systems were mobilized to gain back community trust and acceptance.

Jennifer’s story of childhood bullying, just one of the many challenges she faced, shows how youth may reframe negative events and minimize the negative intentions of others involved in the conflict, in order to ensure a valued sense of self, maintain their positive view of community members, and preserve perceived self-place fit. In other words, she discursively minimized the significance of previous experiences that were clearly painful to her, perhaps as a way to avoid the cognitive dissonance between her positive view of her rural community members, and her personal experiences of being bullied. I asked her about a challenge she had and how she coped with it:

School...I was never the popular kid. But I guess when somebody picks on you, or somebody pushes you down, you gotta get back up. Our high school class, we were always tight knit...Even if you never speak to each other, somebody will always be there.

We had a lot of tormentors in our class. *A lot*...Every one of them that I went to school with that I would say were the tormentors or the popular kids that liked to pick [on people], they were always the baby of the family. So I believe that the older ones were just always picking on them. [It was their way] to push back.

Here, she attributed the bullying to the birth order of “tormentors” within their families and placed the onus on her capacity to “get back up.” Jennifer said she dealt with tormentors from playschool to the end of high school and that, “It was always the same thing. They never did it to hurt ya, right? Like you knew that. It was just the way they were...It was just a tease [to] see if they could get a rise out of you. But as soon as they did they would feel bad. That was all it ever was.”

The above examples demonstrate that youth differed in how they attended to, interacted with, and reacted to (similarly) adverse situations. Indeed, youths’ experiences within places, and their interpretations of these interactions, were integrated into youths’ *characterisations of those places*. I argue in the upcoming section that youths’ constructions of place underlie their assessments of self-place compatibilities and incompatibilities, which have important implications for their selection of coping strategies and their decisions of where to live.

5.3.5 Youths’ Constructions of Self-Place Compatibility

Youths’ orientations, aspirations and actions in their rural places were simultaneously *shaped by*, and *contributed to shaping* the relational, economic and cultural patterns embedded within youths’ social and physical environments. Numerous examples were provided above that showed how external circumstances influenced youths’ constructions of self and place through feelings of inclusion and exclusion, security and insecurity, and feeling in and out of place. Even

when youth had similar experiences within their rural settings, they were found to interpret these in varying ways; thereby producing individual differences in youths' affiliations with and within their rural places.

Youths' experiences *outside* their rural places also shaped their self-understandings and constructions of their rural places. With little choice but to travel outside of the area for employment and schooling opportunities, youth were exposed to new ideas, lifestyles, and sites of identity generation. As Keith suggested, it is, "Only once you move out or get a job in other places you see what people from other areas are like. It's really different." Lydia too, stated, "Once you get out there and there are all of these people that you don't know who are totally different than people are down here." For some youth, their experiences in other places reconfirmed for them the challenges they faced in their communities. Caroline's international travel experiences, as mentioned above, reinforced her intention to escape the "drama" in her own community. Tace, on the other hand, said moving away to college for a year was one of his most challenging experiences. He communicated, "I moved to school for the year [but] I just couldn't live in town. You walk down the sidewalk, you don't talk to anybody. *You are out of place.*" He explained the social, environmental, and recreational options in the other place were not as well-suited to his interests, needs, and financial situation. He said, "[I felt out of place] mostly [because of] the environment. The people you can get to know, but there is just so much going on. Busy, traffic, and you feel like you want to do something in your backyard but you didn't have a backyard. The only thing you can do is go spend money for enjoyment, really in a place like that." These feelings reconfirmed for him his connection to his rural place, which prompted him to return home. Still, he appreciated the self-discoveries made through leaving his rural area. He determined that work, high school and leaving for trade-school were formative

events in his self-awareness because, “With work you meet a lot of new people, get their ideas and put their ideas with yours. You learn a lot of new things that you should try or do.”

Travel to other places revealed to youth the options and services not equitably available to them as rural citizens, as well as the unique assets and opportunities special to their rural places. Youths’ community constructions were often presented by contrasting them with the benefits or drawbacks of other, usually urban, locations. Some youth portrayed their communities as strong fits for their orientations and needs. They wanted more options for local jobs and recreation, but did not want most things to change. When I asked Martin what he would change about the community he replied, “Not too much really, I kind of like it the way it is.” Likewise, Jennifer told me, “I guess a library might be good. But other than that I don’t know if I’d want to bring the city home.” Camden agreed with this sentiment:

It could be nice [to have more services] but I don’t really like hustle and bustle. I don’t really pay attention to stuff like that in the city. I just go and focus on getting out of the city back to home. I think if we had stuff like that around here it would change the way of life. Like it wouldn’t be the type of life that I like right now. It would just be what I don’t like, which is the city.

These youth recognized the challenges confronting them due to socioeconomic transformations in their rural contexts like their limited career opportunities, the lack of diverse recreational opportunities, and few local businesses. However, they also emphasized these deficiencies were opportunities for community betterment. Tara, for example, said, “I’d want more for the community because I do plan on staying here and if I do ever have children in the future I’d want them to be able to grow up having things in the community to do.”

Alternatively, youth who found it difficult to meet their interests and needs locally were more likely to express the incompatibilities between themselves and their rural places. They characterized their rural communities as lacking, and discursively elevated the value of options provided in more urban areas over those available in the country. They described wanting more opportunities, and a sense of limitation colored their descriptions of their communities. In Caroline's interview, for example, she employed *fifteen* different statements that her community lacked resources. She used phrases like, "There's nothing here," "There is nowhere to go," "There is nothing to do" and "Pretty much everything is lacking." Hannah also reported, "I don't feel there are as many opportunities here..." When asked what could improve their communities, these youth wanted to see 'more' in their rural areas: more businesses, more options, and more opportunities. Keith, for example, said, "Definitely put more businesses in. Like stores. Something that would bring people in. Doesn't have to be a big Walmart or anything." In a similar vein, Caroline suggested, "Add something to the community. A mall." Unlike Keith, she added, "But I don't want a bunch of people to move here. [But] definitely something to shop at, even a couple of stores."

In addition to their previous encounters in and out of their rural communities, youths' constructions of self, place, and the compatibility between the two were also influenced by shifting conditions and timing, along with the weighted value of certain needs, goals and responsibilities. The concept of *conditions and timing* was constructed to account for the finding that when socioeconomic, community or broader historical conditions shifted, or youths' values, developmental needs or goals altered, so too did youths' relationships with their rural places. In this study, increased risks or protective figures in the lives of youth, deterioration or the rebuilding of youths' social relationships locally, or the sudden availability and/or lack of

material or structural supports influenced youths' perceptions of, and affiliations with, their rural places.

The concept of *weighted values* was developed to explain the finding that not all aspects influencing the youth-place relationship had equal influence when it came to youths' construction of place, their use of positive adaptations, or their decision to migrate or not. This study revealed that when aspects of self and place appeared in conflict with each other, and thus required resolution, some values were elevated to greater importance by youth while others were devalued by comparison. The process of weighting values was illustrated above through Tara's decision to re-route her career aspiration of visual arts (her passion) to mechanical engineering (a practical but still interesting choice), to make it more likely she could remain in her rural area. The notion of weighted values implies that *different kinds of youth-place compatibilities fulfill different kinds of needs*, and these needs are valued differently by different youth. Another example of weighting values comes from Lydia, for whom maintaining her secure and proximal family relationships was more important than living close to her workplace (as discussed in section 5.3.2). It was important to Lydia that she contribute to her extended family's wellbeing, and she provided this as a key reason she stayed in her rural community. Her example illustrated that even while youth actively made choices and acted in ways to accomplish their goals, they were enmeshed in family, community, work, and other relationships that suppressed or invited the development of those values and goals.

The principles and processes underlying youths' constructions of self, place and the compatibility between the two—including encounters in and outside their rural communities, conditions and timing, and weighted values—are exemplified in Keith's story. When I first met Keith, he was living at home, working at his cousin's towing company, and struggling to figure

out his next steps. He was “sick of living at home,” but also had a hard time articulating the meaning of wellbeing for him or any associated goals. Even without clear aspirations, Keith constructed his future career, relationship, and residential orientations as incompatible with the resources and opportunities available in his rural place. He told me, “I have no idea what [I want to do], but once I figure out what I want to do for school and stuff then I’ll probably pursue from there, [but] I can’t really see anything around here.” He seemed a bit trapped in his situation and without secure peer-bonds locally. He stated that his values directly clashed with those of his rural community because, “they are their own kind of people,” and “don’t know how to act,” and that there was nothing to do locally for fun. He intended to leave his rural community as soon as he had options or resources available to him.

I invited Keith to take part in the *day in the life* portion of the research. We spent the *day* primarily in an urban area, where Keith bought work-boots and supplies for his car. He was polite with the cashiers, and seemed to enjoy our company, as we did his. Throughout the entire *day*, however, we only saw one person that Keith knew personally (his father), who briefly said goodbye as he left the family home for the day. Keith commented later that there were some “ups and downs” in his family relationships. He explained that although he had tried on occasion to bond with his father by working on cars together, “It wasn’t as fun as I thought it was going to be. I was thinking it was going to be like bonding time, but it was more like ‘get it done.’” When we returned to Keith’s house at the end of the *day*, Keith thoroughly detailed his car, which he fondly called his “baby.” Afterward, he cuddled with his elderly dog on the couch to watch tv shows about policing and cars. Keith was sociable with others in town and displayed a quick wit throughout the *day*, but his interactions within his own community were few.

Though Keith portrayed his relationships with his parents as somewhat disengaged, the comfort and financial benefits provided by living at home influenced his decision to stay rurally. Keith described his mom as “quiet” and his dad as “just different” and “more like a boss than a dad.” He told me, “I’m sick of living at home,” but also “I’m not ready to move yet...money-wise and stuff.” In order to move, he wanted to have enough money “and a plan.” He also wanted to be emotionally ready for the change, and have the practical skills, such as knowing how to cook and do laundry. He still appreciated the comforts provided at home. He said that when it comes to meals, there is a lot of “fending for yourself...[but] there is always food in the fridge.”

Over the course of the project, some things changed for Keith. He came to a number of self-understandings and life-path decisions. He expressed at our last meeting that to him, wellbeing meant affording a good lifestyle. He decided upon a career path and started a program in pipe fitting. He explained his chosen career path:

When I signed up for school, it wasn’t like, oh my God I want to be a pipe fitter. Like I knew nothing about it going in. I just knew it would be a good job. And the demand for it is high. And if you go and you try, they guarantee a pass, right?...and instead of going for the job I’d rather go for the job that is going to let me live the lifestyle I want to live. Instead of going for a job that’s not going to pay much. I may like [another job] more or thought I’d like it more at first, but this will let you live the lifestyle you want to live.

In addition, Keith adopted a puppy and his relationship with his parents seemed improved. Keith believed living with his parents now held significant financial value, and that the wellbeing of his puppy was better fostered in a rural location. He emphasized enjoying the outdoor recreational opportunities possible in his rural locale, which is something he described in

conflicting terms during our previous encounters. When I asked him what changed his perspective, he replied “People change with time.” He laughed, “I got a dog now, right? I got pregnant with a dog...a teenage pregnancy.” Keith explained that although there are still some incompatibilities between him and his rural place (for example, he said he still does not socialize much with people from the community), the adjustments he made to improve his life changed his perception of his ‘fit’ with his rural place. For Keith, these aforementioned transformations also prompted a significant redirection of his migration intentions. He said:

Some people need to make [different kinds of] adjustments and they just don’t know it yet. It could be for anything. Just life in general. Like they could go and be a lot happier somewhere else and instead they are here cause they don’t know their opportunity. But I am going to school for the next two years so there is no sense in having an apartment and worrying about bills. Some people would like a city life, but I’m not into a city life so I’m not looking for those things out of the community. I’m more looking for people and connections [outside of the community].

Keith’s example showed how *conditions and timing* matter. In Keith’s case, gains in self-awareness, the development of new capacities, changes in life circumstances, and his active agency, shifted the way he viewed himself and the value of his rural place. It demonstrated that *different kinds of compatibilities fulfill different kinds of needs*. Keith determined his rural place to be a sufficient fit for him, despite some incompatibilities, because living at home supported his educational, financial-security, and lifestyle-driven goals. The same social structures and institutions in which Keith was embedded, and through which his relationships with and within his rural place was formed, also constrained and enabled his orientations toward using particular kinds of resilience processes. These *complex intersections between structure, agency, meaning-*

making and time are unravelled in more detail in the second component of the substantive theory, provided in section 5.4 below.

Keith's story is also a good example of the fluidity in youths' constructions of self and place, and the flexibility in the relationship between the two. As shown above, youth were embedded in dynamic and interactive ecologies, and their actions within them shaped the kinds of encounters they had and how they understood their experiences. In constant flux, the youth-place relationship was continually (re)forming through interchanges between youth and the dynamic social, physical, and socio-political properties of their rural contexts. In reference to this interactional fluidity between person and place, the quality of the youth-place relationship is pictured on the model (Figure 38) as a sliding scale, or continuum.

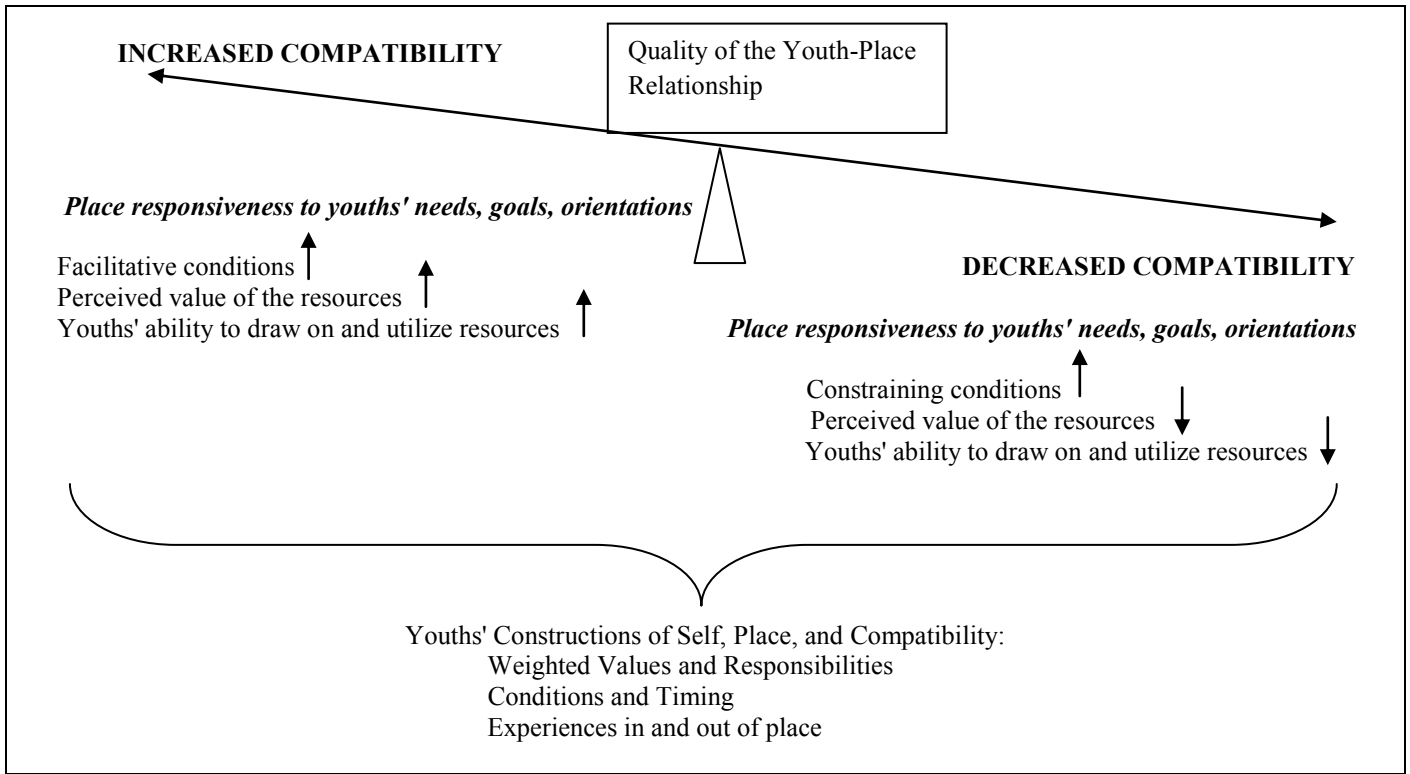


Figure 38 Model of Youth-Place Compatibility.

5.4 STRUCTURE, AGENCY AND MAKING-MEANING: EXAMINING THE AVAILABILITY AND VIABILITY OF POTENTIAL PROCESSES OF ADJUSTMENT

I established above that patterns of interaction between people, places, spaces, and structures, delineate different kinds of youth-place relationships. I showed that youths' understandings of themselves and their rural places alerted them to which incompatibilities in their environments needed to be addressed, and extending from this, which could be overcome while remaining to live rurally, and which situations would best be improved by out-migration. This component of the substantive theory speaks to the tensions between structure, agency, and the meaning-making systems engaged by youth that are proposed as responsible for the patterned differences across youth in their positive adaptations. In Chapter 6, I investigate in depth the ways participants learned certain skills, embodied particular knowledges, and drew upon various resources and supports to positively adjust to the threats of rural economic decline and the incompatibilities between themselves and their rural environments.

Ungar (2011) suggests that the locus of change enabling adaptation to environmental risks is a shared experience between youth and their ecologies. He argues that youths' social and physical ecologies make certain resources available and accessible (or inaccessible) to youth, thus preventing or fostering the processes through which youth utilize their opportunity structures, however marginal these may be. The tensions between structure and agency were certainly exemplified in the case of James.

James overwhelmingly faced extreme and concurrent risks to his positive development. His employment situation was discussed in section 5.3.1, where I left off by explaining that James was actively trying to improve his life chances, find employment, and rebuild his

relationships with community members by attending a government-funded employment course. A few months after our last interview, I learned from James that he had found a job moving rock at a local quarry. Not long after that, I learned that James lost this job and was struggling with depression, anxiety, and frustration in the face of immense hardship. His attempts at rebuilding his life were again rerouted, and his scope for agency further confounded by the paucity of workplace resources in his rural area, his limited educational credentials, his financial and personal challenges in maintaining work and positive relationships within his community, and a multitude of other ongoing hurdles. Despite these barriers to his positive development in his rural location, James did not intend to leave his community, nor did he feel he was able to do so. Instead he noted, "I'm still trying to figure out what to do and everything so I can be here, because the place I like to be is here." When I asked why, he replied, "Because...I'm pretty much worried about if I moved into the city what would happen...[Worried about] myself. And my friends and my family." James' story shows that in the face of significant social, physical, and financial hardship, it cannot be presumed that youth will prefer or prepare to out-migrate to more favorable conditions. His structural and personal barriers hindered him from even believing that some kinds of coping strategies were a possibility for him. Instead, incompatible yet familiar conditions were portrayed as more secure and viable than leaving. His example showed that rural economic restructuring, in combination with youths' other personal, social, and family risks, produces disparities not only in the circumstances youth face, but also in their scope and capacity to address those challenges. Thus, leaving is only a viable option when youth perceive it as a positive strategy *and* they are enabled to build the necessary social, mobility, psychological and financial resources.

A contextually-relevant understanding of resilience, then, suggests that resilience occurs through processes of positive adjustment toward youth-place compatibility (thus improving the youth-place relationship), processes of negotiation that resolve incompatibility, and maintenance of systems that are considered compatible. These positive adaptations are briefly explained below in section 5.5, in order to avoid redundancy in Chapter 6. Below, Figure 39 shows the relationship between compatible and incompatible youth-place relationships, youths' capacities to draw upon certain in-situ and out-migration resources, and the kinds of adjustment or maintenance processes they use to improve youth-place compatibility. Figure 40 reviews the three components of the substantive theory.

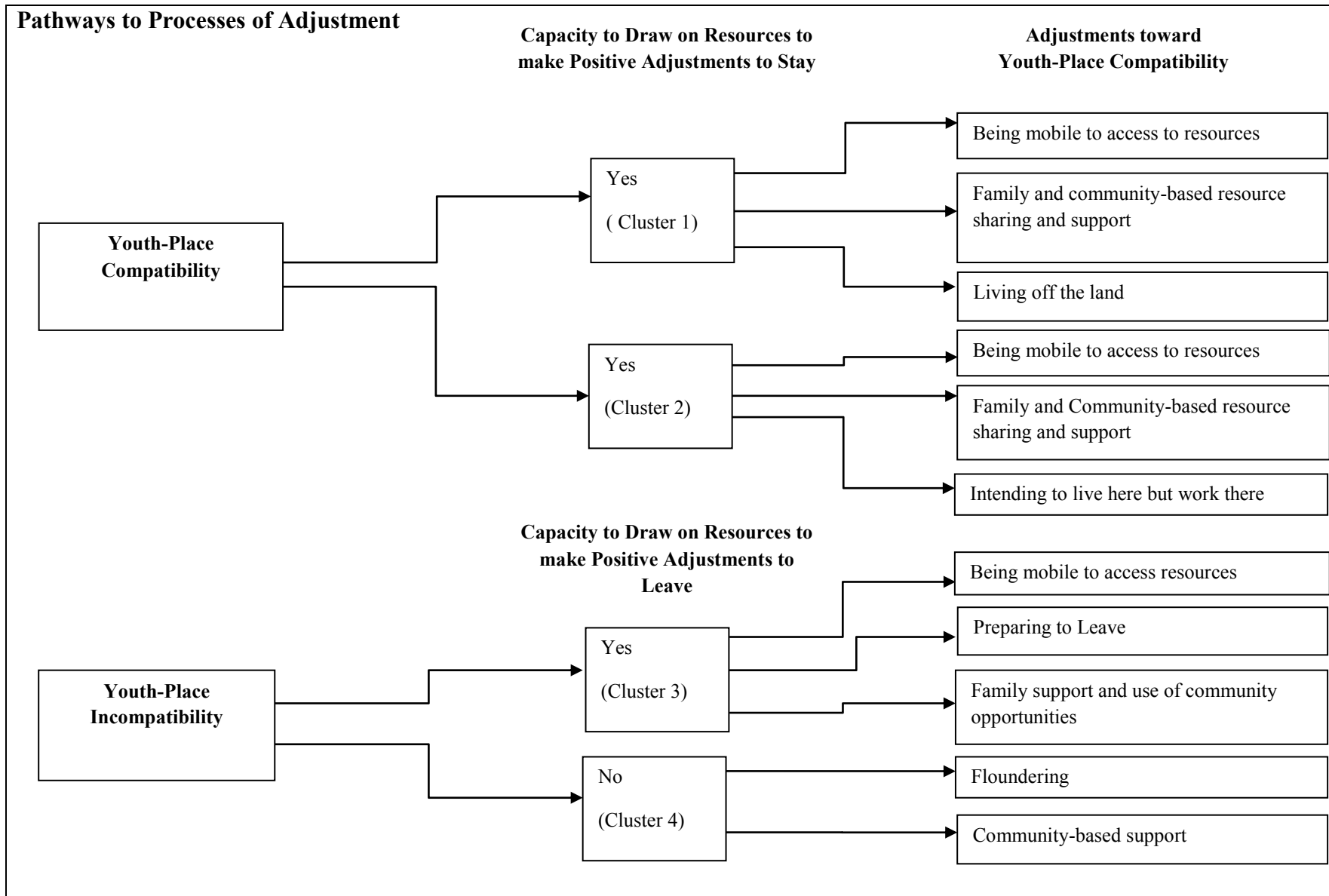


Figure 39 Pathways to Processes of Adjustment.

Review of the Substantive Theory Components

COMPONENT 1: Quality of the Youth-Place Relationship

- * Capacity of youths' environment to address needs, orientations, goals related to:
 - Educational and career paths
 - Secure reference points and subjectivities
 - Natural and built worlds, and recreational preferences
 - Community relationship dynamics and sense of place
- * Youths' use of resources and supports, given opportunities and obstacles
- * Youths' constructions of self and place, and their characterization of the fit between the two, based on
 - Past and current experiences, in and out of their rural places
 - Weighted values, Responsibilities
 - Conditions and timing

COMPONENT 2: Structure, Agency and Meaning-Making

- * Tensions between structure, agency, and understandings of the availability and viability of potential processes of adjustment
- * Learned and embodied coping processes

COMPONENT 3: Processes of Adjustment toward Youth-Place Compatibility

- * Migration and mobility intentions; In-situ processes
- * Processes that improve youth-place compatibility; processes that resolve incompatibility; and maintenance of systems that are considered compatible

Figure 40 Substantive Theory Sub-components.

5.5 PROCESSES OF POSITIVE ADJUSTMENT

Integral to youths' wellbeing in this context of rural restructuring was their capacity to meet the demands produced by deterioration in the economic base. Participants responded in one or more of the following ways: (a) they exercised daily mobility in and out of their rural places, engaging in urban places offering resources unavailable locally (being mobile to access resources); (b) they planned to take advantage of work-networks with reach to more economically-thriving provinces, but that permitted them to stay living rurally (intending to live here but work there); (c) they made plans to out-migrate to locations with more favorable conditions (preparing to leave); (d) they drew upon traditional, practical, and natural-world knowledge (living off the land); and (e) they embraced family and/or community-based support and resource-sharing (family and community support). The rural youth in this study were far from stagnant or immobile, as often suggested in the literature. Rather, most combined both in-situ and mobility processes to secure socioeconomic stability and other wellbeing benefits.

5.5.1 Being Mobile to Access Resources

Almost all youth exercised daily mobility in and out of their rural places, to engage in urban places offering resources unavailable locally, which was discussed at length in the risks section (Chapter 4). These movements generally involved approximately two hours of driving each day. As Eddie commented, "The resources are there if you are willing to drive." Youth without vehicles were dependent on others for travel, or missed out on opportunities offered outside their rural communities.

5.5.2 Intending to Live Here but Work There

Four youth, all males, said that they were considering *living here but working there* at some point. Living here but working there entailed taking advantage of cross-country work-networks, while remaining based in their rural communities. This kind of mobility process involved working “two weeks on” in Western Canada, and then flying home to live for “two weeks off.” Youth did not equate this process with out-migrating or leaving their rural communities. Rather, this adaptation process was argued to allow maintenance of their family and community ties in Hants County, while being paid better wages at longer hours than available in Nova Scotia. It was a strategy only participants involved in farming or trade-work intended to mobilize in the future. Jack, for example, said, “I’ll work out there someday. But [in Nova Scotia] it’s not as bad for me as an electrician. There’s a lot more work here all year round. It’s tough not to go out there when you can make so much money and fly back and forth. A lot of people around here do that.” Likewise, Rob declared, “I’ve had people that I know move away, but they’ve moved away for work. Out west. Where the money is. I’m thinking about doing it...going two weeks on - two weeks off, while still living out here...you are making \$3000 in that two weeks. Like a farm hand out there is 30 bucks an hour to start.”

Youths’ relationships with others who lived here but worked there alerted them to the risks generated from using this process of adjustment, which included long hours, difficult living conditions in work camps, and the constant personal and family transitions associated with being so mobile. Megan provided a photograph (See Figure 41) picturing her partner at the airport, which represented, “another challenge in my life...The challenge of him going back and forth and the shift I have to make each time. But a lot of people in the Maritimes do that I guess.”



Figure 41 Megan picking up partner at airport.

Jack also described the constant adjustments his family makes each time his father leaves or returns from work out west, even though it has been eight years since his father first began this process:

At first it was hard...[But even now] when Dad first gets here, it's like, "What's up?" Like right awkward. Like I see him and he is super familiar, but at the same time I don't see him that much. It screws me right up, too, 'cause I get used to doing everything and he comes back and he's got everything done...It's constant adjustment, I guess.

5.5.3 Preparing to Leave

When the project began, five youth intended to leave their rural areas as soon as they were able or ready. By the end of data collection, one of these individuals changed his mind. Preparing to leave encompassed three sub-processes: taking time to figure things out; making a plan; and building the necessary social, physical, financial and mental resources to make leaving possible. These sub-processes are discussed below.

Taking time: Taking time helped youth figure out who they were, what they were interested in pursuing, and where they might like to go. To return to the example of Keith, when

I asked in his first interview what his goals were, Keith said he wanted to, “Just figure out what I want to do with school and that’s the only goals that I have so far. Just taking the steps.” Taking time to develop greater self-awareness after high school led Keith to shift his view regarding the fit between his goals and the opportunities presented in his rural community. Whereas early in the research process Keith emphasized the incompatibilities between himself and his rural place, over time he re-constructed the relationship in a positive light. Like Keith, Hannah explained that after graduating from high school she, “took a year off when I graduated and just worked and tried to figure out what to do.” For Hannah, however, taking time for self-reflection confirmed her desire to leave. Youth engaged in imaginative processes, wherein they incorporated mental pictures of spaces beyond their own experience to contemplate “fit” between self and varying locales. These mental pictures became the seeds from which youth evaluated potential trajectories of action, set future goals, and decided upon which course of action would best improve their circumstances. Youth intending to leave were willing to embark into new worlds, “just to experience it,” but only once they were ready. Helen stated, “I’ve never experienced it, so I don’t know,” but was excited to try living somewhere else. Caroline wanted to go to school in another province, “just to have the experience.” Likewise Keith, before changing his mind about leaving, said, “[I want to move out] just to experience it.”

Making a plan: Making a plan involved determining the where, what, how, and when of leaving. Youth decided which resources they needed to be able to leave, built time-lines and decided which responsibilities they needed to fulfill before leaving. Keith’s discussion of wanting to leave portrayed all of these components of making a plan. He said, “My goal is to get [my car] paid off and then figure out what I want to do with school. Once I get that paid off I don’t have to go right to school. I can always save up money, right, so...I’d like to go [where] its

closest for schools.” He said he needed money and a plan before he would feel ready to leave, but he was developing a tentative timeline for going, which was, “In the next year or two, probably.” Caroline also knew where she wanted to go and what she wanted to do. She stated, “I want to go [away] to [study in an animal care field] if that happens. Just for a few years to get away...It would probably be in September.”

Building the necessary resources: Youths’ narratives revealed that youth got “ready” to leave by compiling a wide array of resources and developing the life-skills that would enable them mentally, physically, and financially to prepare for a new environment. All youth intending to leave had part or full-time work-positions. Living at home gave youth the opportunity to save money and bolster their financial resources. Keith, for example, explained, “I don’t have any bills now except for my car.” These youth also generated multiple career pathways by purposefully using flexibility and resourcefulness as a way to handle future change. Hannah, for example, said that she had several strategies prepared in case she wasn’t able to secure the work position she was interested in. She stated, “I mean if I don’t get the job I’m thinking about going back to school too.” Youth intending to leave also wanted to have life-skills, like knowing how to cook. Keith joked around that before he left home he needed to learn how to do laundry. He laughed and said, “I don’t even know how to tell the difference between the washer and the dryer.” Youth also noted the importance of building adequate emotional resources to feel comfortable enough to venture into unknown territories. Helen, for example, said she didn’t leave home right away because, “When I graduated high school I didn’t feel like I was ready to move out yet.” Her experiences at college helped her build confidence in her abilities and independence as a student. She stated, “Since I started going to school again I feel more independent, because I am driving there, doing the work, and going to work.” At college, she felt

like she was treated with respect, stating, “There’s a lot more people [and] there’s a lot more freedom...When you go to college it’s not just like people your age, it’s all ages and everybody should have the same right as anyone else.” Helen, who was extremely shy, said that meeting new people outside her community also boosted her confidence about living in a new place. She articulated, “I’m still kind of shy around people I’ve never met before but I’m getting used to it. Like my friends that I just met this year, I feel perfectly comfortable around them now.” Intended leavers also had friends outside of their communities in the locations where they wanted to move. Keith for one, said, “I’d probably live with the person I work with [when I move]” and Andrew also noted he would move in with a friend as soon as he was ready to leave home.

5.5.4 Living off the Land

“Living off the land” or “the way of life out here,” as Tace called it, involved fostering a connection with the natural environment, having an appreciation of the resources it makes available, and knowing how to resourcefully use this natural capital. Youth stated they learned to value traditional, practical, and natural-world knowledge through time spent with their extended families and grandparents. They used their bodies and hands to fashion together materials in creative and resourceful ways. By using traditional health remedies and accessing natural resources (e.g. collecting, growing, hunting and fishing) resources from the land and sea, and, as Jennifer said, “doing it yourself,” youth contributed to their family’s economic situation. Eddie said about hunting with his father, “We typically eat pretty well. We’re hunters so we usually have lots of deer meat and we have lots of meals made with deer meat. Potatoes and vegetables, and we make deer hamburger, and hamburger helper with that, that’s pretty good.” Tace used his image, Figure 42, to explain how he and his girlfriend found pleasure in growing, pickling and storing their own food:

This year [we] had a garden down at my grandparents', and we grew a bunch of stuff, and these are pickles that we made, but we also made homemade salsa. We grew everything out of the garden. Just another thing to show how living out here you can have that stuff. You can't grow a garden anywhere besides a rural area...We made twenty something bottles of salsa, and probably sixty bottles of pickles. That stuff lasts for the whole year, right?...You know what you're eating. No pesticides on it, everything's organic. You're picking it yourself, you're peeling it, you know it's not being peeled by a machine...you appreciate it a little more.



Figure 42 Tace's photo of preservatives.

5.5.5 Family and Community Support

Families were reported as key sources of emotional, financial and/or material support, regardless of whether youth intended to stay or leave their rural communities. Chris said that he turns to his parents for emotional guidance because they are, "Somebody to talk to. I always talk to them about anything. It's just perfect." Andrew, who intends to leave his rural community, said, "Me and my dad. We are really close...if I ever had a problem I usually went to him. Unless it's really big. Then I go to mom."

Intergenerational family relationships were repeatedly mentioned as important protective factors in these youths' lives. Grandparents were valued for passing on knowledge, and supporting youth financially, emotionally, and physically. Andrew said, "I can't remember the last time my grandmother didn't go to a hockey game. Even when she is not feeling good, she goes to our hockey games. Just because she loves supporting her grandkids." Grandparents were most often cited as youths' role models. Many youth spoke of the grief they anticipate feeling at the future loss of their grandparents. When asked to recall a difficult time in his life, Chris said:

My grandfather was diagnosed with [a life-threatening illness], but [it worries me] more so now, because I'm really close with him. And I know there is going to be a day that comes and he's not going to be there...It's unreal [how close we are]...If he was down and out on his last twenty dollars, he would give it to me in a heartbeat. If you needed his vehicle to take to work, call him, go ahead. He thinks a lot of me and I think even more of him.

Families provided a secure base from which youth bolstered their financial resources. Camden said that because of living with his family, "The student loans is pretty much the only thing I have to worry about. I want to stay at home till I pay that back." Elise, too, explained that part of the reason she returned home was because, "I wanted to come home and live with my parents for free so I could pay off all my debt from school." She, like other youth, appreciated the material and physical support she received from her family. She said about her father, "He fixes *everything* so we never have to pay to get our cars fixed. We are really lucky that way...And people wonder why I haven't moved out! As shown through the example of Keith above, even youth who described their relationships with family as disengaged, indicated that the familiarity, comfort and financial benefits of living at home were drawing cards. The family

home can be a safe place to wait, build resources, plan for a change, or recoup after experiencing trauma.

Community support systems were also utilized by youth as they dealt with personal, social, and environmental shifts within their rural communities. I mentioned above that a number of youth mobilized community career-networks and support systems (detailed in section 5.3.1). I also described in section 5.3.4 the ways some young people valued the social, financial, and physical benefits of close community relationships. Tace, for example, emphasized the helpful nature of his community members. He spoke about how neighbours supported one another by sharing resources and exclaimed, “The people! Everybody is so helpful. If you need something, like a lot of times you don’t even need to pay for help. They’ll just come help you or you’ll go help them. If you need something, and you don’t have a truck, your next door neighbour might have it.” Youth who portrayed their personal values as non-simpatico with their rural places, however, were less likely to point to community support as a protective resource when facing challenging circumstances. For James, however, the concept of family and community belonging intertwined. He indicated that in the absence of family encouragement, his community members even provided him with a little tough love:

[Kayla] and [Randy] [they] helped me out a lot. [Kayla] [keeps] telling me I should keep going, take this course and that things will be better. That is what [Randy] told me as well. [Randy] is just like one of my family...A bunch of neighbours [are like family to me]...They always tell me that I should [take measures to improve myself], and if I don’t they will kick me right in the ass.

Though all youth relied on their families for emotional, financial, and/or physical support, and all youth used resources from their rural places to enable their wellbeing, they did

so in different ways. The nature of youths' interactions within their ecologies and their ability to access and utilize certain wellbeing resources were sources of variation in the resilience processes youth used to overcome the strained socioeconomic circumstances in their rural communities. Four clusters of youth-place relationships constructed from the data are discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6 YOUTHS' DIVERSE ROUTES TO RESILIENCE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, I examined youths' relationships with their rural places in Shore Central Hants County, and showed how they were shaped by youths' encounters with people, animals, places, structures and materials in various urban and rural settings. I focussed on how participants varyingly characterized their experiences related to their: educational and career pathways; secure points of reference and subjectivities; recreational and lifestyle interests; community relationships and sense of place. Youths' constructions of their rural areas were shown to be influenced by: their interpretations of these aforementioned experiences; their assessments of the resources and supports available to address their needs, wants and aspirations; prior and current conditions and timing; and the weighted value youth placed on certain needs, aspirations and responsibilities. I reviewed five resilience processes used by participants to overcome the impoverished employment conditions in rural Hants County, which included: being mobile to access occupational resources elsewhere; intending to live here but work there; preparing to leave; living off the land; and/or embracing family and/or community- support systems.

In this chapter, I show how differences in youths' place-relationships foster variation in their development of values, goals, skills and inclinations. I demonstrate how the relational and structural dynamics of youths' places enable or constrain use of particular learned capacities, embodied knowledges, resources and supports, to positively adjust to the threats of rural economic decline. Further, I investigate disparities in how youth are supported to draw upon vital social, mobility, psychological and financial resources as they strive toward resilience.

Four youth-place relationship ‘clusters’ were constructed from participants’ experiences in rural Shore Central, with each showing overlaps and differences in their use of the five aforementioned resilience processes. I termed these four groups the Community Builders, the Tactical Maneuverers, the Opportunity Strivers, and the Systemically Strapped. A model of these four pathways was provided earlier, in Figure 39, Chapter 5.

Youth clustered in the Community Builder category (discussed in section 6.2.1) emphasized their physical, emotional, and social attachments to their rural areas. Compared to the other participants, they were more likely to supplement their personal and family economic-functioning by ‘living off the land.’ I reveal how youth learned the skills that enabled ‘living off the land,’ how these embodied knowledges and capacities were reinforced, and how youth were supported to invoke them to bolster their economic stability and wellbeing in general.

Youth clustered in the Tactical Maneuverer category (discussed in section 6.2.2), stressed the combined benefit of nourishing their emotionally and physically-secure relationships with and within their rural places, with the financial security associated with well-paying jobs. They were more likely, compared to other participants, to intend to apply the skills they learned through trade and farming apprenticeships, to the adjustment process of ‘living here but working there.’ I illustrate how this resilience pathway was made viable as a result of the social, historical, economic and political conditions in which youth decisions and actions occurred.

In cluster three (discussed in section 6.2.3), the Opportunity Strivers portrayed simultaneously positive *and* negative associations with their rural places. They were ‘preparing to leave,’ in search of better educational and career prospects, new experiences, and easier access to a range of work, lifestyle, recreation, and social opportunities. I examine how these youth

were influenced by supportive figures and structures inside and outside their rural places, to build the financial, material, and emotional resources necessary for out-migration.

The experiences of youth in the final ‘cluster’ (see section 6.2.4), that I termed Systemically Strapped, contradicted the otherwise predominant out-migration data-pattern, which was that when youth perceived there to be disjuncture in the quality or applicability of the resources accessible in their rural places to meet their developmental demands, they intended to out-migrate. Rather, in this case, monumental risks to positive development culminated in a myriad of structural and personal barriers that prevented youth from garnering the resources needed to make out-migration possible. Based on the case of one participant, I show how he (and presumably other youth like him), struggled under the weight of systemic disadvantage, yet blamed himself for his inability to meet his developmental needs. I speak to his continued fight to overcome the socio-economic inequities facing him, primarily by embracing community support systems.

It is important to note that the four clusters are not strictly bound and impermeable, nor do they suggest predictability. Rather, they point to overarching categories conceptually connected through patterns constructed from the data at this point in time. These groupings, based on current processes, could change with macro- and micro-circumstances, as well as with time. A concluding paragraph is provided in section 6.3.

6.2 FOUR CLUSTERS OF YOUTH-PLACE RELATIONSHIPS AND THE ASSOCIATED RESILIENCE PROCESSES

Four youth-place relationship ‘clusters’ were constructed from participants’ experiences in rural Shore Central. As mentioned previously, I titled these groups the Community Builders, Tactical Maneuverers, Opportunity Strivers, and the Systemically Strapped. Youth associated with each group showed both similarities and differences in their wellbeing constructions, residential orientations, and use of resilience processes. Figure 5 below shows which participants were clustered across each youth-place relationship, the resilience processes they engaged, and shifts occurring in their place and residential orientations since the completion of high school.

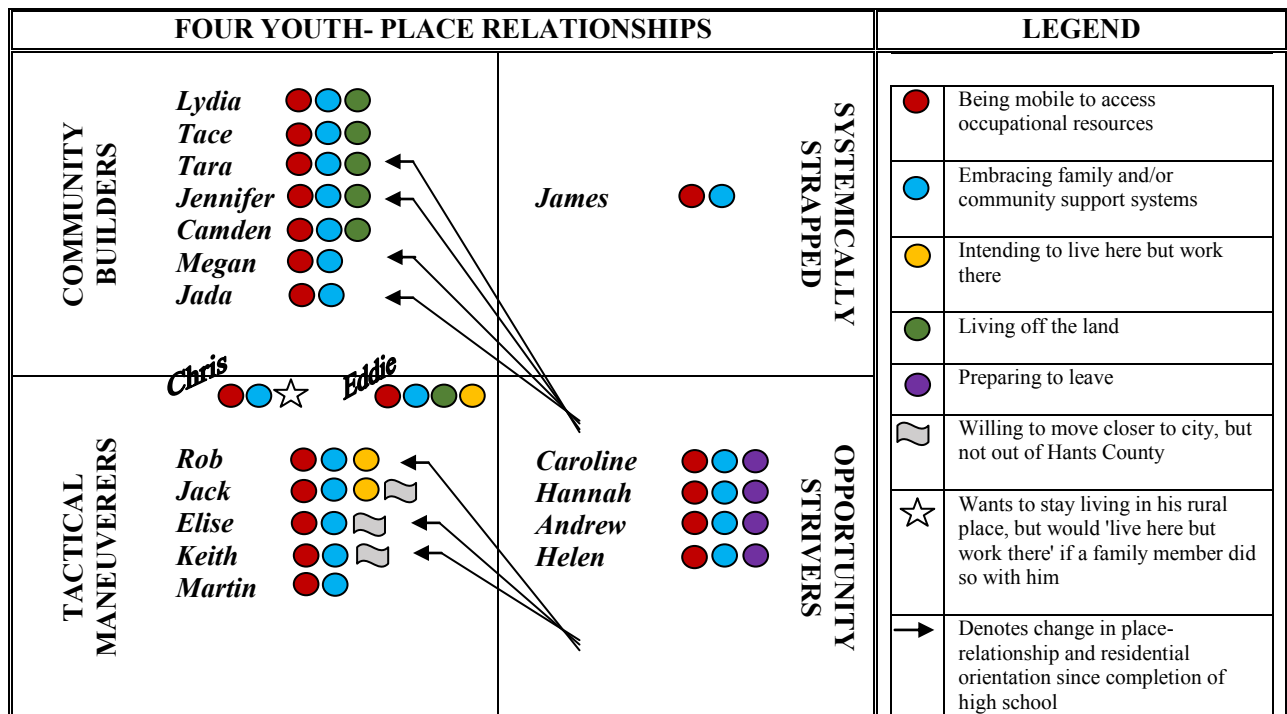


Figure 43 Clustered Youth-Place Relationships and Associated Resilience Processes.

6.2.1 Cluster One: The Community Builders

The Community Builders accentuated their strong emotional, physical, and symbolic attachments to their rural places. They constructed their relationships with their rural

communities as positive and compatible, and suggested their rural environments provided most of what they needed. I begin this section by examining the patterned wellbeing constructions, experiences and interpretations generated for youth who were part of the Community Builder cluster, across each dimension of the youth-place relationship. I expand upon youths' development and use of the resilience process entitled 'living off the land.' I support the claims made at each point through use of Tace's case, who took part in the *day in the life* portion of the research, in addition to quotes and images from other youth participants. I invited Tace to take part in the *day in the life* portion of the research, because despite the challenges of living rurally, he wholeheartedly expressed a sense of place in his rural area and intended to stay.

Wellbeing constructions: When asked what they needed in their lives to live well and overcome the risks confronting them, Community Builders reported that they want enough (money, close friendships, and opportunities, for example) to live happily and comfortably, but not so much that they forget to find pleasure in living simply, appreciating what they already have, and spending quality time with loved ones. These youth emphasized self-sufficiency, responsibility, and financial stability. These youth casted their sufficiency-stance in opposition to ideals of wealth, material possession, and self-indulgence. Tara, for example, said:

My definition of success is a bit off compared to most peoples'. A lot of people think you should have everything that you want and have enough money...I just want to have enough money to support my family. And have the things I want but always have something to work towards...Spending time with people that matter instead of being away all of the time.

Likewise, Camden told me:

[Success means a] steady job, having my own house, some land out around here. I want to be comfortable. Not too much, but just enough...[To be happy, I need] family. That's about it. Good friends. I don't really need money...[Some people leave because] they aren't happy with what they can get around here. Like some people just want everything. They just concern themselves with money. [Their mindset is] if I can go out west and make money then I can buy this and buy that and get the new truck. I'd rather live around here and have what I can earn and enjoy. Fulfillment, I think it is, more or less.

Secure points of reference: It was particularly for these youth for whom the deleterious impacts of rural restructuring appeared to be offset by the comfort and permanence provided by people, places and collective identities in their rural places. Tara told me, "I am not a city girl at all" and Lydia stated, "I'm not much of a city person." They argued that that home bestowed benefits of warmth, familiarity and comfort in stressful times. Megan for example, acknowledged her need for "the comfort of home when I am stressed." All but one of the youth participants lived with their families, and many had extended families in the same home. Megan, the only participant living in her own home, lived not far from her parents. *Family support systems* were drawn upon to bolster youths' emotional, financial and/or material wellbeing. They positioned their self-concepts in relation to their family bonds, and suggested that families impart stability and continuity by "always being there." Residing close to family and contributing to the collective family wellbeing were core aspects of their wellbeing constructions, and key reasons they stayed rurally. During Tace's interview, for example, he reported that he intended to remain living close to his grandparents, who helped raised him, so that he could support them as they aged. He moved out of his mother's home as a teen into the care of his grandparents because, as

Tace stated, “I was always there anyway” and “I always liked it down there better anyway.”

During his DITL filming, Tace spent time in the evening with his grandmother, grandfather, uncle, girlfriend and two dogs. They played with the dogs, shared beer, and told jokes as they watched the sun set over the ocean by their house (See Figures 44 and 45, still-images from the *day’s* video). When I showed Tace his video-compilation, he reflected that he would never leave his community, or ‘live here and work there’, even though the money would be better, because as he stated, “I just like being home every night” and “I get to see my family every day.”



Figure 44 Still-image of Tace talking to family during DITL filming.

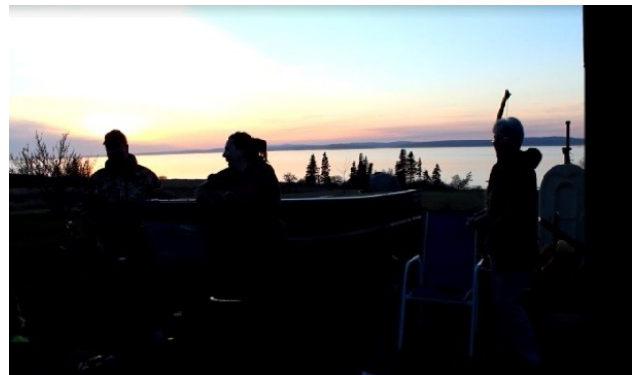


Figure 45 Still-image of the sunset from Tace’s DITL

Community relationships and sense of place: Community Builders shared stories of predominantly good personal experiences in their rural communities, even though they recognized that others had negative interactions due to the lack of privacy among community members. They mainly used the statement “everyone knows everyone” in a positive manner. They described others in their communities as amicable, generous and helpful, and their communities as cohesive and safe. Megan clearly depicted on her life-space map, for example, the relationship between everyone knowing everyone, family and friends, and community safety and security (See Figure 46).

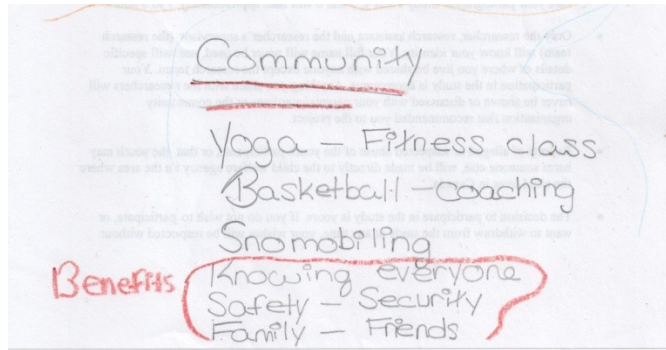


Figure 46 Megan’s life-space map.

Community Builders described feeling a sense of place in their rural communities, and highlighted the congruence between who they *believe they are* (self-concept), and the values they perceive to be entrenched in *where they are*. Tace for example, stated, “I think I would feel out of place anywhere *but* here...You feel like you are home, I guess. You are the same as everyone else. You are not different. You’re not like a sore thumb.”

These youth actively used *community-based support systems*. They sought-out instances of meaningful engagement and socialization in the community, which they in turn suggested strengthened their community relationships. They turned to community members in times of need, and also reciprocated support to their community members. Camden for example, said he did not volunteer at community events, but “I make a note to help. There’s a few older ladies and I make a note to put their wood in and stuff and stack it up...They used to pay me when I was younger but now I just sort of do it because...It’s pretty good to help people.”

Tace’s DITL video showed aspects of his vibrant social life. During his *day*, we filmed him meeting friends at a curling rink approximately 40 minutes away from his community. There, they competed in a curling tournament. Tace’s entire *day* seemed filled with fun and laughter. At noon, he and his friends moved to the rink cafeteria, where they shared food, bought

rounds of alcoholic drinks, and told stories of past adventures. When Tace viewed his video (See the video-stills, Figures 47 and 48), he explained, “That’s always what happens. You have a couple [drinks] and socialize. It’s a pretty social game. It’s just fun and everyone is there for the same reason.” He added that he and his friends also enjoyed a great social life *within* their rural areas. He said, “Age don’t really make a big difference. We got a lot of friends who are a lot older than us, and younger too. It wouldn’t be abnormal to go spend a Friday night with someone who was 60 years old. It wouldn’t be out of place.” Tace used his life-space map (Figure 49) to illustrate, “[Because you know everyone] you don’t have to go all over the place. If you want to go visit someone, you want to go to a friend’s [place], there will be three other friends there. It’s not different crowds.”



Figure 47 Still-image of Tace and friends during DITL filming.



Figure 48 Still-image of Tace and friends curling during DITL filming.

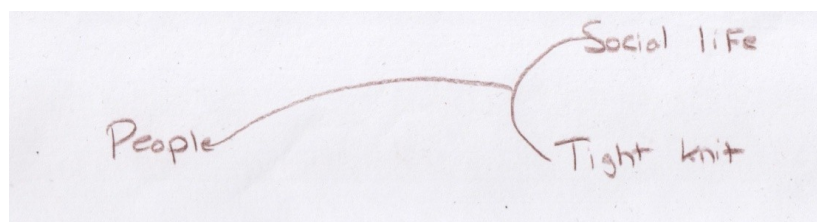


Figure 49 Tace’s life-space map.

Lifestyle and recreational preferences: All Community Builders (except for Jada) strongly oriented to the recreational and lifestyle opportunities made possible by the abundant

natural spaces accessible within their rural places. They spontaneously and incisively spoke about the importance of nature to their wellbeing. They spoke of their relationship with the natural world as core to *who they are*, suggesting an embedding between their psychosocial development and nature. As Jennifer explained, “I grew up on it” (“It” being nature). Their connection with nature was foundational to their decisions to live rurally. Snapshots of nature comprised the bulk of Tace’s photographs (See Figures 50 and 51, for example). Tace compared the hustle and bustle of urban areas, to the calming nature of his rural place:

...being outdoors. That’s pretty important, as you can see from all of the pictures... Just natural sounds yeah. Just nice to get away from everything, especially after working in the city all week. Yeah that’s why I like it out here. You are away when you get here.



Figure 50 Tace’s photo of the woods.



Figure 51 Tace’s photo of the beach.

Tace’s day *in the life* was filled with interactions with and within natural spaces. His *day* was filmed over the course of two half-days. On *day two*, we spent the afternoon and evening outside. He and his girlfriend walked to a nearby beach with their puppy. They searched for sea-glass and shells, pointed to the animals and birds they saw, and spent time dog-training. Still-

images pulled from the video (Figures 52 and 53) display moments captured from their walk on the beach.

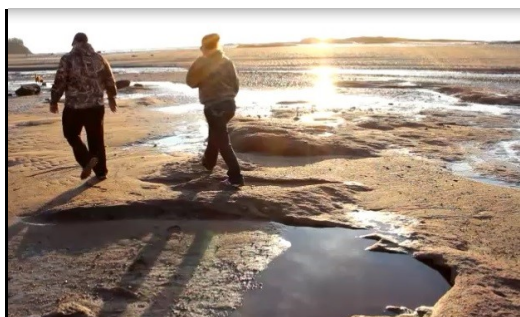


Figure 52 Still-image of Tace and his partner exploring the beach during DITL filming.



Figure 53 Still-image of Tace helping his partner across a stream during DITL filming.

Educational and occupational pathways: Youth in this group were predominantly undertaking schooling, or were employed, in the fields of administration, trades, health, service and farming. Career role models tended to be family members who stayed in the community and still had successful careers, or who introduced youth to their line of work. These youth tended to have access to local work supports related to their career paths, even though the work usually occurred in areas outside the community. Tace said, “My other grandfather is an electrician and I knew I wanted to get into a trade, so I tried it a little bit and that’s what I seemed to like. My father is an electrician so, [it’s] just been passed down.” Their careers were discussed as secure points of reference, and core facets of who they were, but as shown in Tara’s case in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.1), these youth were willing to adjust their career paths to remain living in their rural communities. Many of the Community Builders, particularly those who studied trades, emphasized the benefits of apprenticeship and co-op based schooling systems for youth in rural areas. I expand upon this discussion in the next section, using examples from youth in cluster two (the Tactical Maneuverers).

Being mobile to access work opportunities: To combat the impoverished employment context, Community Builders, like most of the other participants, commuted daily to work or school in more urban areas. Tara said about being mobile to access employment resources, “If you live here, you really have to want to stay here, because you need to commute like three hours every day. You need to be willing to sacrifice your time.” Tace stated, “That’s pretty much it. I got everything else I need to live around here. There is just no work.” His comments exposed how daily mobility became a necessary *and expected* adaptation over one to two generations. He explained, “You grew up watching your parents and grandparents doing the same thing and it was never a sacrifice, it just had to be done. It wasn’t like there was any other option, really. If you want to live here, you go to the city for work.” He revealed the central role of mobility in youths’ capacity to overcome local employment constraints, and how restraints on mobility (like the non-existent public transportation system and the cost of gas) put youths’ positive development in jeopardy: “That’s the biggest thing. If you don’t have your mobility, then it would be really hard. There’s no transit. No taxis. And probably 80 percent of the time you can’t walk to the store.”

Learning to ‘live off the land’: In addition to using family and community-based support systems, and being mobile to access the economic resources, these youth used the resilience process entitled ‘living off the land’ to bolster their personal and family financial stability. They suggested their early childhood experiences were instrumental to the values, skills and place-attachments they formed. Working together as a family produced their first moments of experiential learning. They spoke of how their parents, grandparents, and extended family taught them to perform tasks essential to supporting the family wellbeing. They learned to “do it yourself,” “live off the land” and celebrate a “rural way of life.” Lydia’s photograph of her

brother and a family friend cutting firewood (See Figure 54) symbolized her enjoyment in “doing it yourself” and working as a family. Youth in this group recalled being taught traditional health remedies (like going outside for the whooping cough or using medicinal plants and ointments), how to cut wood, hunt, grow food and fish. They were proud to be self-sufficient and knew how to resourcefully refashion old materials for new uses. Jennifer, for example, explained:

We are so used to not having everything right at our finger tips that we don't run to the doctors for everything. It's a lot of home remedies, a lot of TLC. A lot of it would just be [learned] from my family...[I don't have that education], but I still know [how to do things]. I guess living with elderly..well, older people, I was always taught that you don't need to have six different courses, you don't need it. You learn from watching other people, you learn from doing it yourself.

Experiential learning –learning through doing – was highly valued by these youth participants. They said that these early and ongoing experiences imparted lessons regarding the value of hard work, responsibility and the expectation of family contribution. Camden said about his father: “He is probably the hardest working man I know. He's always tried to support me and mom, and do whatever he can to give us whatever he can, so I respect him for that quite a bit. He is the one who taught me you gotta work for what you want.” They recalled early memories of intergenerational bonding in nature and described understanding through extended observation the migration and mating patterns of animals. They recognized that seasonal changes impacted what could be hunted or grown. Youths' narratives vividly drove home the point that these acquired knowledges and capacities, embodied over time through practice, continued to be useful in their restructuring rural settings. Tace stated, “I am really close with my Grandfather and my Uncle. I was just always around them growing up. They got me into the hunting and fishing,

stuff like that...Everything I know [I've learned from them], really.” Similarly, Camden’s reflection on his photograph of a gun (Figure 55) portrayed how adaptive capacities are shared, learned, and hold significant meaning for youth, thereby influencing the resilience processes youth invoke:

That’s my shotgun. I got it from my grandfather when I was a kid. I’ve used it a lot hunting with him, so there’s a lot of memories and stuff to it...I always went with him before I did it, from when I was three or four years old and could walk. He’d take me with him hunting and fishing, so it kind of just stuck with me I guess.



Figure 54 Lydia’s photo of family and friend helping to cut firewood.



Figure 55 Camden’s photo of the gun his grandfather gave him.

Youth in this group powerfully associated a “rural way of life” with *being* rural. Hard work, resourcefulness, and appreciating the natural world were said to heighten youths’ competencies and values of responsibility, reciprocity, self-sufficiency, and fortitude against the odds. These were, in turn, all strengths youth linked to a positive rural identity (See Chapter 5, section 5.2). A positive rural identity - and the associated embodied knowledges - appeared to offer these youth a powerful wellspring from which to draw personal strength despite threats to stability.

It is not surprising then, that youth in Community Builder cluster were more likely than other youth to supplement their family's nutritional, financial and relational wellbeing by growing food, hunting, and living off the land and sea. Their upbringing provided them with the knowledge to creatively use the resources around them, but they were enabled to activate their traditional and practical knowledge and abilities through the supports and provisions made accessible in their rural areas. They lived with their families on farms, by the water, had hunting camps, or owned parcels of forested land. These assets made it made it possible to grow or collect food and materials from nature. These youth, or family members, owned all-terrain vehicles, fishing rods, chain saws, or small fishing boats. Tace's DITL video visually portrayed the social and physical resources accessible to him in is rural environment, that fostered his ability to 'live off the land.' The still-image taken from his *day*'s video (See Figure 56) shows Tace standing in the sunset. He is leaning against his small fishing vessel, looking across his yard at the fruit trees and garden, the view further extending across the ocean. A barn can be seen in the near distance. Out of the frame of the image, are his grandfather and girlfriend. Behind Tace stand two all-terrain vehicles, another boat and a wood-splitter. These structural and relational opportunities and assets, in combination with the current socio-economic conditions, made 'living off the land' feasible and worthwhile routes to personal and family resilience for youth in this cluster.

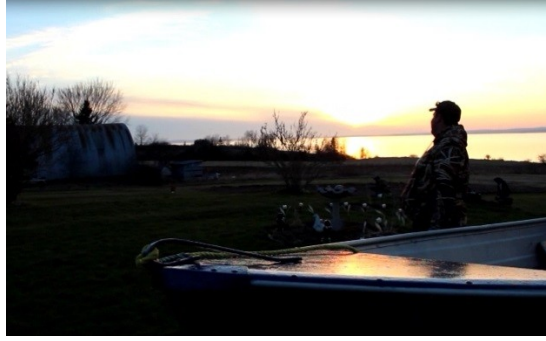


Figure 56 Still-image of Tace with boat and garden visible during DITL filming.

Youth suggested that ‘living off the land’ and making adjustments to be able to live rurally - and the contextual threats triggering continued use of these resilience processes - were nothing new. Rather, participants contended that change, risk and adaptation were continuous facets of rural living, and had been that way for generations. Living off the land and honing a positive rural identity involved embodiment and maintenance of age-old systems, which continued to be relevant in the current socioeconomic climate. Camden clearly made this point when he stated:

It’s just kind of the way it’s always been around here for generations. If you want to live around here and if you’ve actually got the urge to live around here, and if something is attaching you [to here]...like I don’t see them as sacrifices I see them as... like adaptations. It’s a part of your everyday life and you need to do it. It just kind of becomes like rhythm. You just do it.

6.2.2 Cluster Two: The Tactical Maneuverers

I termed the second cluster of youth the Tactical Maneuverers based on two striking foci constructed from their data: 1) their attachments to their rural places (whether this be for emotional, physical, social or financial reasons) and 2) their emphasis on building financially-

abundant livelihoods. Like the Community Builders, they primarily constructed their relationships with their rural places as positive and compatible, and intended to remain living there. They also used community and family-based support systems, and mobility into urban areas, to acquire work opportunities and other resources. Unlike youth clustered in the other groups, the males in this group were comparatively more likely to suggest ‘living here but working there’ was a viable option they intended to utilize to build financial security. I begin this section by examining the patterned wellbeing constructions, experiences and interpretations generated for the Tactical Maneuverers, across each dimension of the youth-place relationship. I primarily turn to the case of Jack, whose experiences and pathways to resilience in rural Hants County were representative of those portrayed by youth clustered in the Tactical Maneuverer group.

Wellbeing constructions: Tactical Maneuverers explained that wellbeing meant affording the lifestyle they wanted and maintaining positive friend and family relationships. In their discussions, youth separated work life and private life. Living well was said to entail having a job that pays well so that one can enjoy a “good life.” Martin for example, said, “[To live well I need] a job, need a car, that’s about it. A good life.” Eddie said he needed, “A good job, and a nice house and lots of friends to hang out with and be around a lot. A truck probably, to go hunting and fishing with.” Chris voiced, “A bad thing to say, but money. Money does make the world go ‘round. But I have my friends. I can go a couple days sitting at home by myself, it gets boring. I need somebody to talk to or at least do something with.”

Secure points of reference: Tactical Maneuverers indicated they felt secure, and their rural places were constructed as compatible, when the resources and supports offered by their rural environments enabled them to find secure jobs, build the lifestyle they wanted, and

maintain the peer and family relationships important to them. Chris, for example, said, “I graduated...I immediately started work. I’m working steady since I graduated. I hang out with my friends every night. I’m living the life of Reilly, pretty much.” He added, “Family is the biggest thing in my life.” Jack similarly indicated, “[I stay because of] comfort. [It’s] familiar. I like it. I just like to kinda stay around with my friends.” Jack noted that living at home “is a good fit,” because he has a good job located in the city, and few house-bills thanks to living with his family. Indeed, the Tactical Maneuverers emphasized the comfort, familiarity, and financial benefits of living with their families.

Community relationships and sense of place: Most of the youth in this group suggested that everyone knowing everyone in their communities was positive, and that social, emotional and physical community supports were available if needed. Their positive relationships enabled them to draw upon *community-based supports*. All but Keith aligned their self-representations with the way they described other community members. As Jack mentioned, “A lot of people have a lot in common. Everybody seems to get along.” They discussed their thriving social lives in their rural places, and most stated they were friends with just about everybody. Jack described the collective nature of his community:

Everyone kind of does stuff in a group. Like there’s a social aspect that’s pretty active. You can always find something to do. It’s never boring really. You don’t have to sit at your house and do nothing...Sometimes I’ll just drive...and I’ll see somebody and pull over and talk to them...You may not have seen them in a couple weeks, but you can pull over and talk to them like you just saw them yesterday.

Recreational and lifestyle preferences: These youth called attention to the recreational and lifestyle benefits fostered in their rural areas, as well as the beauty and physical space

afforded to inhabitants. They emphasized the value in what Jack called, “a rural lifestyle.” To him, and youth clustered in the Tactical Maneuverer category, a rural lifestyle denoted freedom and nonconformity to outside (usually discussed as urban) rules or expectations. He noted the independence emergent from the space surrounding him:

Oh yeah, [there is] way more [freedom here]. I’ve stayed in town for like a week, but I’m like get me out of here after a while. Too busy. It’s not a bad thing or anything, but it’s nice to go somewhere that’s not like that all of the time. I think if someone from in there were to come out here and stay for a week compared to me going in there for a week, they’d be like, ahhh, this is fuckin nice. They’d be like, wow, I’m going to get the hell out of [town].

Educational and occupational pathways: Tactical Maneuverers were studying or had positions doing trade-work, like plumbing, electrical and welding, or farming, health care, and administration. Youths’ explanations of their forays into these forms of work, taken-up to combat the dwindling work options in their rural communities, depicted a complicated interplay between structure and agency. The occupational paths these youth traversed toward resilience were found to be powerfully influenced by youths’ relationships with and within their rural places, their habituation into certain ways of thinking and acting, and the social, historical, economic and political conditions in which youth decisions and actions occurred.

To begin, Jack’s case showed how youth are socialized into valuing and navigating particular pathways to resilience in economically-declining settings. Jack explained that in his rural community, he was exposed to community models of success and intentionally decided to follow in their footsteps. He said about making the decision to learn a trade:

I kind of just figured out [what I wanted to do by] looking at what other people were doing. They were all older, but I was like, right on! A lot of people around here are, like a lot of my friends a bit older than me are doing that, so that kind of affected my decision I guess. Like they are all doing well and finding lots of work.

Once youth made the decision to get a trade, study farm management or acquire professional credentials, they applied purposefully to schools offering apprenticeship and co-op style programming. Youth said they were enticed into these professions and educational-formats not only because of their personal strengths and interests. These programs also offered support from teachers, shorter educational time-lengths and thus faster work-entry, government incentives, and anticipated job security. Jack explained how his decision to study a trade was strategically motivated based on the desire for quick employment and long-term plans for financial security:

In high school, people who want to go to university, that's fine, but I think people should plan further ahead a bit more about what they are going to do. Like so many of my friends just, they are not even going [to university] any more...I go to community college [and] I am going to walk out with a job in April. I don't even take my backpack out of my car.

Jack said that the potential of optimizing his employment options provided a source of inspiration to work hard in school. He explained practice was foundational to transferring knowledge into skills that could be applied when addressing life challenges. He pointed out that his teacher not only passed-on production skills, but helped him understand how to relate his classroom experiences to life more broadly. These sentiments were typical of those from Tactical Maneuvers. He stated:

If I have something that's hard...I just do it until I get good at it. Practice it till it's perfect...You have to put a little effort in. Like when I am at school, I am there to learn, to work. The teacher says, think about it like you are getting paid. Like every day you come in and you learn something. I didn't miss a whole day last semester... You find something you are interested in and you're like, alright, let's do it! It's big for you too. You want to do good because you want a job.

Youth learned theory and skills in the classroom under the tutelage of teachers, then honed these skills in the field under the guidance of employers. Though supported, youth proactively organized their own options for learning outside the classroom. Some youth were helped to find co-op or work placements through their schools, but most mined their positions as community members to discover apprenticeship opportunities. Because these kinds of networks were already established in their rural communities, they were easier to recognize and penetrate, thereby enabling youth to remain living rurally. This was how Jack confirmed his apprenticeship through a community career-network:

Everyone says the company [I work for] is the best one going...[Bart] takes care of guys from out here. It seems like if you are from around here and you needed a job [they will try to help you]. It makes you feel a little better. When I wanted my work term I called him up and I was like, "Hey man," and he knew my parents. I was like, "I was just wondering about a work term" and he did it right up, no questions or nothing. I didn't really know him, but I live around here so I called him and told him who I was. And he was like "oh yeah, yeah, I'll give you a job." It was so easy! It really panned out well that way.

Living here but working there: Tactical Maneuverers were more likely than participants across the other clustered place-relationships, to indicate that they intended to ‘live here but work there.’ ‘Living here but working there’ entailed working two weeks ‘on’ in western Canada, and returning home for two weeks ‘off.’ Jack had family and community connections that made ‘living here but working there’ an available and supported adaptation to the poor rural work context. Jack reported that his Dad exercised this migration pattern for almost a decade. He, along with other friends, were people Jack intended to turn to for advice in order to establish his own cross-country work opportunities. He said, “Dad knows some of the stuff about working camps, he would have some advice about that. I know quite a few guys from around here [who live here but work there]. [One guy] is a foreman and I’m pretty good friends with him so, that’s good I guess. Couple of hook ups.” Youth intending to ‘live here but work there’ in order to bolster financial success promoted a best way to get educated, enter the labour market, and improve their skills so that they could increase their pay and opportunities across Canada over time. Jack articulated:

I think it’s better to stay [in Nova Scotia] and get your hours first [as an apprentice] and then work your way up to your Red Seal, like a journey man, ‘cause then you are certified, right? [Then] you’re not under the apprenticeship. And then you get paid more and there’s less bridges you gotta cross to go work out [West]. You are certified all across the country once you pass that test. It just makes it easier to go out there and work.

Jack explained that the benefits and work environment were significantly better in western Canada than in eastern Canada. His father passed along this message to Jack:

Dad said it’s way easier [out there]. He’s a boilermaker. It sucks if you are a boilermaker here. It’s so cold. Like here they want you to finish as fast as possible, and you work as

super hard as possible. But out there it's all safety [unionized], so it's slow and it's better for you and way more money.

Tactical Maneuverers, even those not 'intending to live here but work there,' seemed to actively weigh the pros and cons in determining where to live. Elise, for example, was willing to move closer to the city for practical reasons. She said, "I wouldn't move into the city but I might move closer someday when my dad's going to retire soon...I don't like winter driving." As another example, Jack explained that given his financial goals and the otherwise compatible fit between him and his rural community, it was better to 'live here and work there' rather than out-migrating altogether:

Yeah, you can't just go out there [West] to make money. And it's not even that good if you live there 'cause you got to pay to live there. So it's really only good if you are living here. Two [weeks] there and back... If you live there it means you'll make more money than someone who works here, but it will just be average out there. So you'll be average, just the same as you would be here, pretty much.

Youth divulged that 'living here but working there' really only became a common and viable adaptation to the risks of rural economic restructuring over the course of one generation. Jack articulated that he grew up with the people around him utilizing this strategy, that overtime he viewed the separation of 'working' from 'living' as normative, and that eventually he "got used to" the constant adjustments associated with the process. He recalled, "Sometimes [my father would] be gone for three months or six weeks or whatever...I adjusted, dealt with it, didn't let it bother me. That's a good way of dealing with stuff. It took a while to get used to. He's been out there since [before I became a teenager], so it just seems regular to me...After a time you get used to it. After a year or so, it becomes natural."

6.2.3 Cluster Three: The Opportunity Strivers

Youth clustered into the group I termed the Opportunity Strivers were preparing to out-migrate from their rural communities. Their youth-place relationships were complicated, in that they enjoyed many aspects of their rural places, and yet emphasized the incompatibilities between themselves, and the social, economic, and educational atmospheres of their rural places. They portrayed their paths to success as inevitably taking them away from their rural communities. There seemed to be greater diversity in the youth-place relationships of the young people intending to leave, and any differences found are noted below. There were, however, also distinct similarities in their experiences, goals, the kinds of supports and resources they valued, and the ways they built and utilized these to address incompatibilities between themselves and their rural places. It should be mentioned that because I only worked with youth still living in their rural communities, I did not document the potentially multifold reasons other youth out-migrants left Shore Central. I can only speak to the reasons provided by the youth participants on the brink of leaving, but not yet gone. I call primarily upon the example of Helen to demonstrate these points, because her experiences were representative of those for the Opportunity Strivers.

Wellbeing constructions: Opportunity Strivers dually-emphasized that living well and succeeding meant “doing something with your life” and/or “doing something you love.” These young people explained that being happy required following one’s passions, finding one’s purpose and gaining personal fulfillment through enjoyable work, satisfying activities, and connecting with the people in their lives. Careers were considered a labour of love and a way to express one’s self. Personal happiness was prioritized over wealth. Hannah for example, said, “[Wellbeing is] something that you are happy doing every day. It’s not always about money or anything like that, as long as you are happy.” They also emphasized their desire to “do

something” with their lives. They stressed the personal power gained by taking control of their life, breaking free from dependence and lethargy, and achieving personal goals. This desire to “do something more” is apparent in Helen’s career decision-making, discussed below.

Subjectivities and secure points of reference: When asked to speak about themselves, Opportunity Strivers focussed primarily on their connections and strengths related to their families and animals, personal interests, and their school or career intentions. Interestingly, they did not position their subjectivities in relation to their rural places. Helen in particular showed ambivalence toward her rural place and the idea of home. In her photographs, her least favorite photo depicted her house and the surrounding fields. She said, “The [photo] of my house [is my least favorite]. It is not really that important to showing my community. I don’t know.” When asked what she sees as the strengths in her community, Helen had a hard time answering. After several moments she replied, “I don’t know.” When asked if she had a photo that portrayed what is great about living in Hants County, if anything, she said, “Not really.”

I invited Helen to take part in the *day in the life* portion of the research because despite the risks she faced, she was considered by my community connections to be doing well. More, she planned to out-migrate as soon as she was financially and emotionally ready. Helen was shy, soft-spoken, and very bright. At age 18, she lived in a small trailer with her mother, father, two younger sisters, and her adopted dog. Helen reported she was close with her sisters, mom, aunt and grandmother. She was extremely close with her dog, who she adopted after it kept showing up on her doorstep. She included 10 photographs of her dog in the photo-elicitation portion of the research alone. During her DITL, Helen spent a significant amount of time with her family. At the beginning of the *day*, she and one of her sisters travelled to a nearby town about 30 minutes away to run errands. On the drive, Helen gave her sister advice about opening a bank

account (See Figure 57, a still-photo from the DITL video). Later in the evening, she helped her younger sisters with their homework. That night, her mom cooked pancakes and bacon for supper, while Helen and her sister did homework, occasionally popping into the kitchen to talk to their mom (See Figure 58).



Figure 57 Helen gives banking advice to her sister during DITL filming.



Figure 58 Still-image of Helen and sister watching mom make a pancake dinner during DITL filming.

I showed Helen her video compilation and asked, “How do you decide who cooks and who does what around the house?” Helen answered, “Just whoever does it, does it.” She further reflected, “We don’t all usually sit down to eat very often. We are usually like...some of us would eat out here, some of us will eat in the living room. Just wherever.”

Like the Community Builders and Tactical Maneuverers, the Opportunity Strivers gleaned emotional, financial and material support from their family relationships. However, in contrast to youth especially in clusters one (the Community Builders) and four (The Systemically Strapped), Opportunity Strivers did not indicate they would ‘worry’ about whether their family would be ok if they left. They down-played their contribution to the family household. When prompted, they spoke of mowing the lawn, cooking, or helping with dishes, but did not spontaneously reveal that their family contributions were key to their personal wellbeing or their family’s daily functioning. For example, Caroline said, “I don’t help out much I guess, but

sometimes I do help out in the summer. Sometimes I do the dishes. I do laundry too.”

Opportunity Strivers nonetheless had meaningful relationships with their families, but it appeared that the *kinds* of family contributions youth felt responsible for differed across participants, thereby differentially influencing the nature of youths’ attachments to home and place, and the residential decisions youth felt comfortable making.

Community relationships and sense of place: Except for Andrew, Opportunity Strivers reported complicated community relationships. Though some reported a few close friends were still nearby, the majority said their friends left home after high school. When I asked Helen what it was like to grow up in Hants County, she said, “It’s been pretty good. My friends live close. Well, they *used* to.” She added that her community was lacking, “Fun things to do. [My boyfriend is] pretty much the only person left around here of my friends, so, everyone else has gone away to college.”

Youth in this group were more likely than the Community Builders and the Tactical Maneuverers to suggest their values were incongruent with those they considered entrenched in their rural places. Except for Andrew, they highlighted their interactions with community members as their most challenging adversities. They did not portray everyone in their communities in a negative light, but were more likely to suggest that everyone knowing everyone was a developmental risk in itself, because it can cause and exacerbate interpersonal hardships. Helen’s characterizations of the people and social dynamics in her rural community were mixed. When asked what young people in rural Hants County needed to grow up well, she replied, “Good parents. There are a lot of them that aren’t [good parents] here...Parents that drink all of the time and get high all of the time, and people who just rub right off on their kids and they are exactly like them.”

Recreational and lifestyle preferences: Opportunity Strivers expressed dissatisfaction with the recreational, social, occupational and lifestyle resources in their rural locales. They used comparisons between their experiences in urban areas and their own communities to illustrate the lack of recreational resources available in their rural areas. Their discussions regarding options for recreation were colored by their encounters of inaccessibility, limitation, and unavailability. They reported that there was “nothing to do” or “nothing around here” and that there was need for a car to travel to “do anything.” The word “more” punctuated their narratives concerning the lack of options, services, jobs, resources and young people locally. When asked what she would change about her rural community Helen stated, “I would bring more stuff here for us to do...More stuff for kids to do after school and more jobs, so people don’t have to travel so far.” Similarly, Andrew said:

There’s a connection from having your own space and being away from resources. Like if we had more resources, maybe there would be more families who would live here and maybe more people would stay here...There is always a common medium with everyone. But this village could afford to have a few more people and resources, ‘cause it would be nice to have a neighbour sometimes.

Intended leavers expressed paradoxical feelings toward their communities’ natural and built environments. They appreciated the natural, aesthetic and spatial properties of their rural locales, and yet emphasized the inherent tensions between the space surrounding them and their dislocation from valued resources and opportunities. On her life-space map (See Figure 59), Helen notably depicted the push and pull between space (which provided a quiet, relaxed, private community atmosphere) versus easy access to recreational, work, and social opportunities. She stated, “You are far away from everything. Just being closer to everything [in a city appeals to

me]. You don't have to drive as far. It's not so much gas money and stuff like that." Helen was particularly eager to have the ability to walk from place to place.

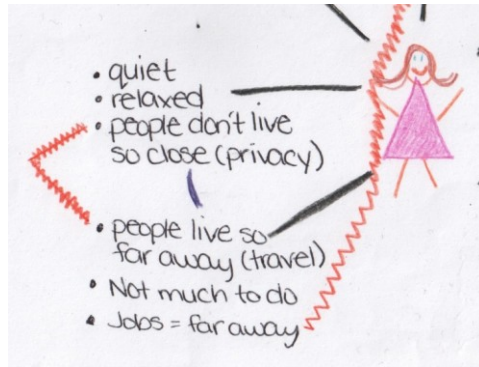


Figure 59 Helen's life-space map.

Though all of these youth had travel experiences, only one previously lived in an urban area for a year. These youth were excited, as Helen explained, to try "something different." Indeed, Opportunity Strivers stressed that the temptation of easier access to quality options and opportunities, and the appeal of exploring new places and experiencing something different, were key drivers prompting their intended out-migration.

Educational and career pathways: The Opportunity Strivers indicated that their secure futures hinged on good careers. Professional development, achievement, motivation and competence underscored youths' goal-driven behaviours. In Helen's first interview, for example, she spoke of her actions taken to gain control of her situation, maintain her independence, and achieve her personal goals. She was studying in a health systems field and hoped to leave her rural areas as soon as possible. When asked why she chose her career-path, she indicated that she purposefully selected something of interest, to prevent lethargy and immobilization. She said, "I made myself find something that I would be interested in just to get myself back into going back to school." She noted her school competencies were important personal assets. Doing well in her

courses helped her like them. As she said, “I didn’t really know at the beginning of the program [if I would like my program], but all of the medical words, I find them really interesting. And I just do really good in that class so it makes me like it a lot more.”

Like Helen, all youth in group three took time to decide upon their career-paths after high school. They were interested in occupations like human services, academia, sciences and medical systems - occupational paths they described as less common in their rural areas. They were less likely, compared to the Community Builders and Tactical Maneuverers, to know family or community members in their fields. Helen stated that her educational and career-building priorities were mainly fostered through her relationships with professors and other students at her school located outside her community. She said, “If I am really stuck on something then I’ll go see my teacher... we have communications and this semester we work on resume building and my teacher brings in people from the [professional] community...and random other people from big companies and they come in and set it up like an actual interview.” Helen, like the other Opportunity Strivers, also turned to their family relationships for emotional or physical support related to their schooling. She explained, “I usually go to [my mom and sister] for school assignments, to ask them to look over them, to make sure that they sound good. And mom’s just always like, ‘You don’t need me to do this. You know you are going to do fine.’ You always think the worst. But I always end up doing pretty good.”

At no point did youth clustered in the Opportunity Striver category state that their parents conveyed the expectation that they should leave their communities in order to be successful. These youth informed that their parents wanted happiness for them, regardless of what form of work they chose. Andrew said, “ [My parents’] expectations of me is to go to school and try to do my best, whether it’s in a trade or in a degree or wherever it is. As long as you are doing

something and you are doing it the best that you can, they will be happy.” Interesting though, were the messages these youth absorbed about the improbability of finding secure careers by following in their parents’ footsteps. Andrew for example, explained that at one time his father’s wood-hauling business thrived, but changes in the rural economic base eroded the viability of that work option. Andrew received this message:

My dad said that I would never be allowed to work in the family business ‘cause he always said that he wanted me to go to school. Like he said that that was one of his biggest mistakes was not going to school and getting an education.

At the time of the project, Helen’s father, who worked as a brick layer, was laid off from work. Helen said he was considering looking for work two weeks ‘on’ in Alberta, and two weeks ‘off’ at home. I asked Helen how she felt about her dad losing his job. She replied, “He can’t really do concrete in the winter, so he got laid off. That’s the way it always goes.” I asked how she felt about him potentially leaving to work in the west. She responded, “I don’t know. It would be weird [but] I’m not really worried about it. Everybody around here does it pretty much. You can’t really get ahead with jobs here. That’s what dad said.” She received the message from her father that certain kinds of work offer weaker job-security, and that “getting ahead” demands leaving.

Youths’ intentions to out-migrate, however, did not singularly appear to hinge on their hopes of a quality education and thriving career. Caroline was one of the youth intending to leave home to study elsewhere. When I asked her whether she would take advantage of training opportunities if they were offered locally, she replied, “I think I’d still go...just to have the experience.” Her answer suggests that youths’ migration-decisions are propelled by multiple intersecting forces that extend far beyond simply their educational or employment prospects.

Indeed, as discussed above, several interesting patterns of youth-place interactions affected youths' subjectivities and sense of security, recreational and lifestyle interests, and community relationships, and they culminated to inform youths' intentions to out-migrate.

Preparing to leave: 'Preparing to leave' involved taking time to figure things out, making a plan, and building the necessary social, physical, financial and mental assets to make out-migration possible. Helen's experiences were characteristic of the participants who intended to depart. Firstly, she took time off after high school to determine her career interests. By 'picturing' herself in potential scenarios, she decided upon a career in a health systems field. As she said, "I took a year off school 'cause I wasn't sure, but I just decided. I've always wanted to work in a hospital and I've always pictured myself doing [that kind of] work."

She was actively making a plan. She spoke about building secure housing, occupational and social prospects outside her rural community. She ascertained that leaving would be a better 'fit' for her, and contemplated which migration-resources were needed to feel comfortable enough to leave. She had a timeline and a vision of her optimal future. She planned to be, "working at hopefully the new [town] hospital. Living somewhere different with [my boyfriend], and getting a better job than the [corner]-mart," the local store where she worked part-time.

Helen actively built her financial and personal resources in order to leave. She strategically took advantage of the structural and institutional resources in her rural environment to build her financial, emotional and material capital. During Helen's DITL, she drove to the community store where she worked to pick up some snacks. She spoke with fellow workers, before independently ringing through her purchases. She was obviously very comfortable in that environment. By working at the store while going to college, Helen simultaneously constructed

valued educational and career opportunities, while she accumulated the money necessary to afford a car, living expenses and to one day leave her community.

Helen stated that it was primarily thanks to her job at this local store, that she overcame her social anxiety and consequently constructed the *emotional* comfort it required to flourish in a new place with new people. She articulated:

Just after I started working at the [store], it started to bring me out of my shell, because everyone is familiar now and I kind of know exactly what they want when they come in.

Everything all happened at once right when I got the job at the [store]...I wanted a car, so I had to get a job, and it was close to home.

I became increasingly impressed that she agreed to participate in the project once I learned just how debilitating her social anxiety was for most of her life. She said that growing up, her shyness was so severe that she avoided speaking in public. She made her sister order food or speak to others on her behalf. Even now, she liked to write down what to say before heading into a new situation. She expressed, "If I [order something, make a phone call], I have to write it down and read it in case I forget something." By spending time at college outside her rural area, and exploring the place where she wanted to move, Helen helped sensitize herself to potentially new experiences, social dynamics and systems. She admitted, "I'm still kind of shy around people I've never met before, but I'm getting used to it."

6.2.4 Cluster Four: The Systemically Strapped

A fourth pattern emerged concerning the way youth grappled with the adversities associated with rural restructuring. It was characterized by complicated youth-place relationships, repeated and often long-term unemployment, and ongoing struggle to overcome significant socioeconomic risk. The case example comes from James. His significant personal, family, social and economic hardships were compounded by the burdens of restructuring, which consequently restricted his capacity to find work locally, or to assemble the resources required for out-migration. I begin by discussing his complex relationships with and within his rural place. Doing so helps to explain how and why the combination of self-transformation efforts and community-based support networks pivotally fostered resilience for youth facing extreme disadvantage.

Secure points of reference: Families were found to simultaneously be forces of support and sources of stress. James' family relationships were tumultuous. In his first interview, he opened up about his father abandoning him. He told me, "[My Dad], he just don't want to deal with me...Probably he's sick and tired of my anger issues. But he shouldn't be one bitchin' out at me saying I'm doing it wrong and this here. I never hear him say, 'Good son, you did a good job'...I always hear it in other father and son relationships, but I never hear my Dad say it." After a particularly intense fight with his father, James ran away from home, and his mother decided to leave her husband. James recalled, "When dad left we started packing. Mom never tell Dad what we [were] doing. We just packed." James' mother moved in with James' brother and his brother's partner, but James decided to make his own way. He said, "I was going to move in with them but I prefer not to because it was probably too much stress to have brother and brother, plus my mother, and [my brother's partner]." James moved in with a friend, whose partner soon kicked

him out for not being able to afford the rent (discussed more below). It was at this point James became homeless for several months, until he was able to reconnect with his mom and return to their trailer. James felt overwhelming guilt because he believed he caused the break-up of his family. He told me, “Since Mom split with Dad, I bear more anger, because I always think that it’s all my fault. This all started when I had one big fight with Dad.”

James looked up to his older brother, who at certain points physically and emotionally supported him. When asked about his aspirations, he replied that he wanted to gain the kind of independence and security his brother had. His success influenced James' efforts toward self-betterment. He explained, “Like, I want to change my stuff around because I just turned 23 years old. Since [Ben] turned 23 he got himself an apartment. Now I want to be just like my brother.”

Despite the ups and downs with his family, James reported that worry for his family’s wellbeing partially held him in Hants County. He said, “One thing is, I don’t want to leave my mother in case something bad happens. And I still have my grandmother. She is 94. I don’t want to lose or leave her.” James’ interviews palpably showed his desire to maintain close proximity to figures offering emotional security, and illustrated the complex interplay between security-maintaining and insecurity-avoiding in some youths’ contemplations about where to live.

Recreational and lifestyle preferences: James enjoyed the set-up of his community, because it enabled him to walk to friends’ homes. He also took advantage of the natural spaces so plentiful in his community, and noted the relationship between coping, exercise and being outdoors. As he said, “[My community] is really beautiful and gorgeous and everything. Every time I walk down there, if [there are] stars and everything, it looks like the stars are touching the trees. [I walk] to take things out of my mind.”

Community relationships and sense of place: Youth's relationships with their community members were found to profoundly influence their recognition and use of the protective resources available to them. More, it was revealed that community interactions directly affected youths' mental health and the ways youth viewed themselves. James spoke of caring deeply for his community, family, and friends, and yet by his own account most of his relationships were complicated. He told stories of getting into fights, being bullied, and getting used by others to drive him places. His negative community experiences left him feeling particularly unsafe and contemplating retaliation. He said about the onset of the panic attacks that plague him:

People two years ago smashed mom's mailbox and chucked eggs at the house. And after that a couple of days later, when mom wasn't home, they must have had a firecracker that sounded like a gun. I was in bed. And when they set that off, I've been paranoid since. Every time I hear guns, I duck right quick and look around. I get so scared and everything. After that, it built up my anger issues, to [want to] go find them.

On the other hand, James articulated that some community members took on parental roles during times of family absence or strife. As he said, "A bunch of neighbours...are like family to me." He recalled the time when his friend's mother heard he was homeless, and she invited him into her home:

I went to my friend's place and her mother...felt so bad. So she tell me, "well, you know us. If you are looking for a place to stay you can [stay here]. But the one thing is, I won't charge you nothing, but can you do this for me, can you do chores?" So that's what I did. I stayed there six months at the house doing chores and everything and having a great time.

According to James it was his anger - propelled by feelings of anxiety and frustration about his employment situation and his poor relationship with his father - that caused him to lose respect in the community. James used his life-space map to portray his efforts toward self-betterment to regain their trust. He took government-funded employment-assistance courses upon the advice of elders in the church to which he belonged. He drank less, avoided negative situations, and tried to control his anger. He rejoined a local community group - of which he was once a part - which allowed him to give back to his community, and to rejuvenate positive relationships with members. James explained his self-transformation, and the impact it had on Kayla, a community member:

I know [Kayla] was some happy when she heard that I am changing. [Kayla] just didn't trust me anymore. With all my anger issues and everything, she didn't want me to be around the kids. But since I have been taking this course [I have been] thinking... 'I'm going to try this. I'm going to move on.' That's what I did. I'm starting to move on.

Indeed, James was recommended to the project by his community minister, who described James as "on a path to resilience," because he saw James actively working to improve himself, his relationships, his employment skills, and his life chances more generally. During our interview, James drew his life-space map as though it truly was a map, marking options for potential pathways to varying lives. Each corner of the page represented different life options, some he already experienced, and others he hoped to create through positive actions. I could not include the map here, because he wrote numerous names of community members with whom he had positive or negative relationships, at each 'location.' He declared:

This [corner] is the stupid people doing drugs and everything. I don't want to be in this group...And then this group here is wanting to keep calling [me] for a drive. 'Can you

drive me here because I am too loaded and everything?’...The Users...Screw it, no. Tell you the truth though, I used to be in with a bad group of people [but] I’m just sick and tired of people bull-shittin’. Who treat me like shit...I am done with every single thing. Now it is my turn to make [my] life!

He was hopeful that the government-funded employment skills program would be the key to redeveloping his life opportunities and that through this program he would build healthy relationship patterns and find work. He said, “I don’t care about [the negative people] anymore. Since I was in this [program], I don’t care about these friggin’ idiots. They can go do coke or pot - I got other stuff to do now!”

Educational and occupational pathways: For some youth, the transition from high school to work was anything but direct, fluid, or easy. Rather, significant discrepancies were found in the opportunities offered to different youth, and the ways participants were able - or enabled - to effectively utilize structural and institutional opportunities to facilitate their shift from school to employment. James for example, struggled to find work following high school. He was briefly employed as a cleaner before losing his job because of his temper. Several factors intersected to amplify negative outcomes and restrict his employment entry and work options. The occupational possibilities for which he was qualified were limited, due to restructuring of the labour market, or they were seasonal positions. His lack of training and post-secondary credentials, mental health and learning challenges, experiences of homelessness, poverty, unreliable automobile, no public transportation system, and the cost of fuel culminated to significantly impact his ability to engage the limited resources and supports present in his rural area.

He recalled his first experience of homelessness. It was triggered when he was forced to leave home during his family's breakdown, and due to unemployment, and the limited and unaffordable options for housing locally. He revealed:

I was still trying to find some job but I just can't find myself a job. [I was staying with a friend] but her boyfriend just friggin' *flipped* at me. He was like, "You know this is a month now and you haven't paid us and everything." And I was like, I'm trying to find myself a job bud...I just [put] in my resumes already, and he's like, "well you have to get out bud"...So I pretty much slept in my car for three months.

Vehicle breakdowns and limited gas money left James depending on his brother to drive him places. These factors also severely constrained his potential job search area. James blamed himself for having no means of transportation, even though no alternative public option exists. He informed, "My car is broken right now...Me being stupid, I was overtired [one] night and let someone drive it. They blew a bearing in it. I should have been the one to be responsible enough to drive it... I just, hopefully I will get a job after this program is done and then get my car fixed." Repairing his vehicle while attending employment courses was unlikely. James explained, "...I'm making about 9 bucks an hour...[but] I am learning a lot. It's my favorite thing to do."

Following his employment-skills training, James was briefly employed moving rock at a quarry, but not long after, he lost his job. This unexpected circumstance plummeted James' sense of self-worth. He now had better training, but the work he qualified for still earned a minimum-wage and was typified by seasonal ebbs and flows. Just as importantly, James' other personal, family, and community risks were not simultaneously addressed through the work program. These issues, like poverty, alcohol problems, vehicle breakdowns, bullying and mental health challenges, influenced his ability to sustain employment. Indeed, though many of the challenges

James faced were amplified by structural disadvantages, he floundered between hope he could remake his life, and uncertainty, fear and frustration about the future. He framed his perceived lack of success as emergent from his own failures, yet could not pinpoint what additional changes to make to improve his life chances. James recently posted messages about his loss of work on an online forum open to the community. Two of those messages stated, “I just don’t know what to do any more” and “What is wrong with me?” His example demonstrated that without the supports and systemic solutions in place to address the multiple and interactive risks associated with living rurally, some youth interpreted their socioeconomic problems as their own inability to succeed.

And yet despite the risks of remaining rurally, James did not intend to out-migrate. Indeed, he did not believe leaving was an option for him. As mentioned above, James worried what would become of himself if he left. His incompatible and risky yet familiar community conditions were viewed as more secure than the imagined (or very real) risks of leaving. He said, “I’m still trying to figure out what to do and everything so I can be here, because the place I like to be is here.” He explained that he would be worried about what could happen to him, or his family if he left. James’ example illustrated that in developmentally-hazardous situations, it cannot be presumed that youth will prefer to out-migrate. Rather, leaving is only considered a potential adjustment to deal with the threats of rural restructuring when youth perceive it as positive *and* they are enabled to build the necessary social, mobility, psychological and financial resources. Instead of preparing to leave, James used his active agency to maintain and mobilize responsive community support networks, and transformed this social support into economic sustenance, as described below.

Mobilizing community-based support systems: As discussed throughout the findings, a number of positive community factors were found to be associated with youths' adaptive development during times of socioeconomic change in rural Hants County. In James' case, it was clear that exposure to at least some well-functioning role models, peers and supportive community members helped protect him against economic destitution. Indeed, James was able to engage his community ties to compensate for his challenges in a number of ways. Emotionally, he had friends he depended upon to share his feelings of fear and anxiety. As he said of his new friend, "[Jillian], she is a friend. We just met, but she likes things that I like to do and she has always cared for me and everything. I know what she likes now and she knows what I like...I tell her everything about me, because I want her to know all of my fears and everything else." Through his community contacts, he became linked to local employment information and government-funded training opportunities. He said close community supporters encouraged him to, "... keep going, take this course and that things will be better." He activated community support and transformed it into economic benefits. For example, as mentioned above, a community member provided James the opportunity to 'buy' a used car from his local business, by permitting him to volunteer time in exchange for the car. Not only did James now have a vehicle - necessary to fostering youths' wellbeing in rural Hants County - he also learned mechanical automotive skills through this exchange. For James, this was an incredible opportunity, because as he stated, "I love to work on cars. I just want to be with cars and I want to learn about it." Importantly, James' experiences illustrated that even though he faced incredible hardship, he still actively used his own agency to traverse risks and enhance his own resilience.

6.3 CONCLUSION

To summarize, in these findings chapters, I presented a theoretical framework that was generated using social constructionist grounded theory, which helped explain how differences in youths' relationships with their rural places were conceptually related to their differential use of resilience processes, and their varying migration intentions. I showed that youths' rural social and physical ecologies were differentially suited to foster the development of, and positively address, certain kinds of youth preferences, needs and aspirations, thereby resulting in a range of compatible and incompatible relationships between youth and place. In turn, youths' place-relationships, shaped by structural, economic, relational, and socio-political factors, were shown to constrain or enable the viability, availability and use of certain adaptation and migration-decision processes in response to the risks associated with rural economic restructuring.

In the next chapter, I review the key findings, in order to dispute, support or expand upon other theoretical models. Then in the following chapter, I propose the ways in which the findings may be used to inform rural development, youth resilience research, and rural policy.

CHAPTER 7 KEY FINDINGS AND THE THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the next two chapters is to review the key findings, theoretical implications, and policy and intervention applications of the current research. In this study, I examined youths' narrative and visual depictions of their lives in rural Atlantic Canadian contexts exhibiting socio-economic strain and transformation. Drawing on development-in-context and social constructionist perspectives, social constructionist grounded theory was constructed to explain intersecting processes of heightened importance to rural youth resilience.

I begin section 7.2 by summarizing the processes underpinning the substantive theory and highlighting key findings pertaining to youths' varying relationships with and within their rural places. More specifically, I explain how transactions between youth and their rural environments influence how they experience socio-political and community change, understand the meaning of wellbeing and resilience, and affect youths' capacities to draw upon and use resilience-promoting resources, supports and processes. The findings are important, because they show that youths' experiences within, and characterizations of, their rural places are related to their migration intentions and the kinds of adaptation processes they use to address the risks in their environments.

In section 7.3, I discuss the contributions to resilience theory made by the current study. In particular, this research sheds light on two areas largely neglected in the youth resilience literature, firstly by conceptualizing the ways youths' relationships with places affect their adaptive responses within economically strained rural environments and secondly by accounting for the influence of macro-structural transformations on youth developmental processes. I

suggest how the current research supports or challenges other theories of youth resilience, and show how my research addresses gaps and extends empirical knowledge about youths' adaptive development in contexts of rural restructuring.

7.2 KEY FINDINGS

This research makes an original contribution to resilience literature through the construction of a substantive theory that explains *when, how, and why* different kinds of processes are used by varying groups of youth to cope with the challenges produced by rural restructuring. Conceptual links were unearthed between youths' relationships with places; the ways they strived toward resilience; and where they wanted to live. To review, the theory clarified intersecting patterns across three components:

- the core category of youth-place compatibility, which refers to the quality of fit between youth and their rural places;
- youths' adaptations and/or maintenance of processes that foster their positive development amidst the changes occurring in their rural places;
- and the relationships between structure, agency, and the meanings youth make from their experiences, which together create patterned differences in youths' orientations toward and ability to engage certain kinds of adjustment, maintenance, and negotiation processes.

7.2.1 Youth-Place Compatibility

The core category of youth-place compatibility concerns youths' perceptions about the quality of fit between themselves and their rural places. Youths' characterizations of their rural places as compatible (or incompatible) with their needs, wants, aspirations, and subjectivities were important, because constructions of self-place compatibility (or incompatibility) were related to whether youth wanted to stay living in their communities, and the kinds of adaptation processes they engaged to address the risks in their environments.

When characterizing their rural places, youth integrated positive, negative, and, often, even paradoxical feelings developed from a wide range of experiences that occurred in and outside their rural communities. They expressed opinions about the quality of resources, structures, supports, and opportunities in their rural locales. When youth believed their rural environments offered a variety of valued educational, occupational, recreational, social, emotional security, and identity resources to support their needs and aspirations, they were more likely to accentuate the compatibility or fit between themselves and their rural places. When youth deemed their rural environments to be inadequate for enabling them to make changes to improve or maintain valued resources and supports in those same areas, they were more likely to stress the incompatibilities or lack of fit between themselves and their rural places.

Attention to youths' standpoints revealed significant variations in youths' constructions of wellbeing and success even within the same research setting. Their definitions of wellbeing ranged from "having enough, but not too much," to "living the good life," to "doing something with my life" and "doing something I love." Analysis of these diverse understandings of wellbeing illuminated the guiding principles behind youths' routes to resilience and provided the foundation for understanding their *weighted values*. Weighted values was a concept developed to account for the finding that youth placed greater value on meeting some needs or achieving some aspirations over others, and these weighted values differed among young people. Due to the fact that youths' rural places are differentially suited to meet certain kinds of needs and wants, and because youth placed more or less value on addressing certain kinds of needs and wants, what made rural Hants County compatible (or incompatible) for one youth differed from what made it compatible (or incompatible) from another youths' viewpoint. In other words *different kinds of youth-place compatibilities fulfill different kinds of needs*.

Youths' needs, wants, and aspirations were found to shift over time, as their values, the way they saw themselves, and their life circumstances changed (understandings accounted for with the concept *conditions and timing*). This suggests that both youth-place compatibility and youth resilience have temporal and historical components. The recognition that historical forces, contextual conditions, and the timing of transitions and decisions in a person's life will have developmental consequences is not new (See Elder, 1998). This finding is nonetheless important, because it implies that as youths' values, developmental needs or aspirations alter over time, so too do their relationships with places, their decisions about where best to live, and the processes central to resilience. Recognition of fluidity and changes in youths' lives and their contexts avoids simplistic, one-off interpretations that isolate resilience and youth development from their socio-cultural context and the relationships in which they are embedded.

7.2.2 Processes used by Rural Youth that fostered Resilience

Youth simultaneously utilized multiple processes to deal with the socioeconomic and other burdens confronting them in their rural communities. Youth balanced processes of adaptation with processes exhibiting maintenance, mobility with in-situ responses, and innovation with time-weathered knowledge and skills, in order to thrive in a shifting economy. Though these processes may appear at odds with one another, in practice youths' diversification of approaches in dealing with the effects of rural restructuring seemed to improve their likelihood of wellbeing outcomes. These processes bolstered the compatibility of the relationship between youth and where they lived. The continued use and applicability of these methods was fostered by the socio-cultural and structural contexts in which they were situated.

Youth used one or more of the following in-situ processes:

- maintaining and transforming family and community systems of support to build the emotional, financial and/or material resources to deal with the risks in their contexts;
- and living off the land, which involved maintaining practical skills passed down over generations of how to creatively use and refashion resources collected from the land, sea, and forest.

Mobility processes were key to youth accessing the educational, occupational, and other resources and services lacking in their local areas. Youth made, or intended to make, adjustments that included one or more of the following:

- being mobile to access employment resources, which involved driving approximately two hours daily to more resourceful (usually urban) areas;
- intending to live here but work there, which meant living in their communities while embarking on bi-monthly, cross-country labour migrations to work in locations offering better employment opportunities than available in their rural areas;
- and preparing to out-migrate from their rural areas altogether.

However, there were clustered variations in youths' use of the various resilience processes, which I review in the next section.

7.2.3 Explaining the Clustered Variations in Youths' Orientations Toward, and Ability to Engage, Certain Resilience Processes

The young people invited to take part in this study were in the throes of navigating multiple and intersecting transitions in their lives. They were making important life course decisions about their relationship, residential, educational, and employment directions, while simultaneously dealing with the disintegration of community services and major transformations in the labour market. Youth showed overlaps and differences in how they coped with the lack of employment opportunities and other considerable challenges within their rural places. By focusing on youths' accounts and interpretations of their experiences in rural Hants County, four patterns of youth-place relationships were generated.

Two clusters of youth—the Community Builders and the Tactical Maneuverers—described their rural place-relationships as predominantly compatible. They characterized their rural places as allowing them to meet their most-valued needs and aspirations, and they were more likely to intend to stay in their rural places. Two clusters of youth—the Opportunity Strivers and the Systemically Strapped—portrayed their relationships with and within their rural places as complicated, albeit for different reasons. They depicted their rural places as lacking in opportunities to nourish their most-valued needs and aspirations. They were more likely to want to leave, but only when they were confident they could build the social, psychological, and financial resources necessary for out-migration. When youth exhibiting incompatibilities between themselves and their rural places were enabled—for example, by embracing family and community support systems—to shore up the resources needed to go, out-migrating was considered a viable solution to address the challenges in their contexts. The Opportunity Strivers, however, felt changing their residential settings would improve the compatibility

between themselves and where they lived. The Systemically Strapped youth demonstrated challenging and often paradoxical relationships with and within his rural place. He was faced with structural, mental health, and economic hurdles that prevented him from mobilizing migration resources, and portrayed the incompatible yet familiar conditions as more secure than the anticipated risks of changing where he lives.

Certainly youths' individual strengths and actions were key elements in their capacity to respond to threats produced by rural restructuring. However, this research also revealed that youths' agencies, skills and aspirations were shaped through family, community, work, and other relationships that restrained or advanced the development of particular ways of thinking, acting, and being. Moreover, youths' capacity to use certain processes to address their challenges and improve the compatibility between themselves and where they live was shown to be constrained and enabled by the structures, supports, and power dynamics in their environments.

Community Builders suggested that living well despite the risks they faced means "having enough, but not too much." They gained fortitude from their strong physical, emotional, and social connections with and within their rural places. They described their capacity for coping with the challenges in their lives as intimately linked to their intergenerational family relationships, rural identity, rural way of living, and connections with place. They selected occupations that provided financial security and were of interest to them, but also allowed them to remain living in their rural communities. Residing close to family and contributing to the collective family wellbeing continued to be core aspects of their resilience constructions and key reasons they stayed or returned to their rural areas. Their upbringing was highly focussed on intergenerational learning, family participation, and learning through doing, with activity directed toward the goals of family contribution. This process of gaining and maintaining

culturally-valued skills through routine, tactic, and directed observations and interactions via shared endeavors is what Rogoff (1993) calls guided participation. Through guided participation, youth learned how to use resources from the natural world and refashion old materials for new uses in an effort to be economically thrifty. Their access to personal and family assets, like fishing boats, and to natural spaces facilitated their ability to ‘live off the land.’ They emphasized their appreciation and respect for the economic, social, recreational, and mental health benefits the natural spaces in their rural places offered them. Community Builders actively used and contributed to strengthening community-based support systems. They meaningfully engaged with other community members and often volunteered to support or improve their communities. Community challenges were portrayed as opportunities for betterment.

Tactical Maneuverers emphasized the advantages of maintaining their emotionally and physically-secure relationships with and within their rural places, while simultaneously making strategic decisions they believed would help them build financially-thriving livelihoods that would protect them against current and future economic shocks. They suggested that their wellbeing was fostered in their rural locations because they could live the “good life,” free from, and nonconforming to, outside (primarily portrayed as urban) rules or expectations. The experiences of freedom and independence they valued were made possible due to the physical structure of their communities, the lack of policing, and the space surrounding them.

Tactical Maneuverers were long-term thinkers, who made financially-informed decisions that integrated their knowledge about the economic conditions in their rural places with those in other locales. They emphasized the value of apprenticeships and coop programs for rural youth, and actively planned for, sought out, and took advantage of work opportunities offered through family and community-based networks. They selected occupations based on the potential for

quick employment, long-term security against potential economic blows, and their understandings of which jobs would be in demand for the foreseeable future. Compared to other participants, the male Tactical Maneuverers were more likely to intend to apply their trade and farming skills to ‘living here but working there.’ They knew family and community members who could help them gain access to these cross-country labour networks. They recognized the difficulties associated with frequently transitioning in and out of their communities, but their statements also revealed that they viewed these patterned migrations as locally normative and a way for families to diversify income streams and improve livelihood.

Opportunity Strivers were actively seeking environments that could foster their ability to “do something with their life” or “do something they love,” or both. Their wellbeing constructions were underscored by values and goals like realizing one’s potential, personal growth and development, and achieving one’s aspirations. Knowledge, education, self-awareness, and good careers were depicted as security resources. Opportunity Strivers were paradoxically drawn to the space and beauty of rural living, and yet recognized this space disconnected them from the opportunities located in areas closer to towns or cities. Opportunity Strivers were preparing to leave their rural places for the potential of better educational and career prospects, new experiences and adventures, and easier access to the work, lifestyle, recreation, and social options they desired. These youth expected leaving to open up new opportunities for them or at least allow them to experience “just something different” from what they were doing. They could imagine themselves living elsewhere, whereas many of the other participants said they could not imagine living anywhere else but in their rural area.

The Opportunity Strivers had supportive figures both inside and outside their communities who influenced the development of the skills, mindsets, and assets to leave. They

were employed or going to school, owned a car, had enough money to pay for the gas and repairs, and were unburdened by worry about whether their family would be okay if they left. These factors cumulatively enabled youth to develop the emotional, physical, and financial ability to venture into new locales. The experiences of the Systemically Strapped youth, in contrast, showed that the structural aspects of youths' lives may constrain rather than enable access to the resources that allow them to bear the costs of leaving.

I termed the final youth category Systemically Strapped. It was constructed from the experiences of one participant and thus requires further investigation. Significant personal, social, and structural barriers complicated the Systemically Strapped youth's capacity to thrive in his rural area, while also blocking him from accumulating the resources necessary to leave. Cumulative hardships left him feeling frustrated, angry, and anxious about his future. Though many of his risks were systemic and compounded by the socioeconomic decline in the area, he blamed himself for his inability to accomplish a number of deeply held desires, like finding work, having a romantic relationship, and securing his own place to live. Though he actively sought and took advantage of opportunities to bolster his employment qualifications, the possibilities to capitalize on these skills were limited due to restructuring of the labour market and other ongoing adversities. Leaving was not an option even considered by the Systemically Strapped youth. Instead, he focussed on making personal transformations and self-improvements to align his behaviours with those socially-accepted by the community members he respected. By regaining community trust, he was able to turn community-based social, economic, physical, and emotional support (or community capital), into economic capital.

7.2.4 Space, Place, Identity and Mobility

The research outcomes vividly highlight the intersections between rural restructuring, youths' relationships with and within places, youth resilience, and young people's decisions about where to live. The four clusters of youth-place relationships constructed from youths' experiences in rural Hants County contradict predominant generalizations of the unattached, non-conflicted migrant, as well as the backward, uneducated, and stagnant stayer (Looker & Naylor, 2009). Researchers like Corbett (2007) and Looker and Naylor (2009) draw attention to the ways the Nova Scotian educational system pulls young people further away from their rural communities the more education they acquire. Most certainly, the connection between education and the out-migration from rural places is an essential one to make. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, most of the participants in the current study were well-educated and pursuing careers of interest to them, regardless of whether they intended to stay in or leave their rural places. The situation for youth in rural Hants County is somewhat unique in that several coinciding historical, spatial, and technological factors make it possible to gain post-secondary education or maintain full-time employment in more urban areas, while living at home. Distance education and the Internet allow youth who can afford it and who live in locations where the Internet is available to take online classes. The physical location of Shore Central means many of the province's colleges, universities, and career opportunities are located approximately one hour away for youth who can afford a car.

Only one participant, the Systemically Strapped, expressed fear and embitterment about the difficulties he faced in advancing his economic position in his rural context. The other youth intending to stay—the Community Builders and the Tactical Manoeuverers—were far from uneducated and untraveled, and their lives were far from static. Like the intended leavers, they

actively challenged themselves to learn, grow, and experience new things. However, their experiences outside their rural communities, though valued, reinforced for them the importance of place, home, collectivity, and of feeling *in place*. They saw their strong connections to their rural places, community members, and identities as strengths, not deficits.

It appeared that for Community Builders, their identification with the people, spaces, and subjectivities they associated with their rural places provided a sense of connection and continuity amidst alterations in their environments. They called rural people inherently resilient. Their ideal notion of who one is to the core—a rural person as synonymous with resilience—may offer youth protection, because it reinforces trust in their capacity to handle threats. Moreover, it cohesively links these youth to the perceived strength of collectivity—of facing hardships together as a rural community and as rural people. Idealized identities may help youth facing transitions maintain a sense of community (Mahalingam, 2006), and help them to give meaning to current and past challenges (Gupta & Ferguson, 1999). As Gupta and Ferguson (1992) point out, “The irony of these times, however, is that as actual places and localities become even more blurred and indeterminate, *ideas* of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient” (p. 10).

The migration intentions of the Opportunity Seekers were found to be influenced *only in part* by the educational and employment conditions within their communities. Their dreams of living somewhere else, at least for a while, were also shaped by their determinations of self-place fit, sense of security, recreational and lifestyle interests, community relationships, and encounters inside and outside their rural places. Participants often experienced contradictory positions and paradoxical feelings about their rural places. Though they emphasized the opportunities and resources lacking in their communities, they also indicated close attachments with their friends,

families, and animals. They nostalgically recalled meaningful moments shared with others growing up, yet did not align their subjectivities with the values they believed to be dominant in their communities, like the Tactical Manoeverers and the Community Builders did. Their adverse experiences or “dramas” with others in their communities, which were emphasized as key stressors by all Opportunity Strivers but one, illuminated the way feeling *in or out of place* is intimately connected with the *politics of place* and youths’ migration decisions. These findings support Jones’ (1999) proposition that migration and staying are in part explained as responses to exclusion and inclusion experiences that influence youths’ development of socio-spatial identities and their relationships with their home communities.

Generalizations of the unattached migrant also fail to adequately depict the viewpoints of the Tactical Manoeverers, or the fact that different kinds of mobilities, such as ‘living here but working there’ and ‘being mobile to access employment resources’ may be used as a means for thriving in rural communities. According to the Tactical Manoeverers, ‘living here but working there’ is an adaptive strategy that allows individuals to maintain their relationships with and within their rural places, while also providing livelihood stability, given that few secure occupational options exist for young people in rural Hants County. Walsh’s (2012) study in economically strained locations in Newfoundland also found that rural individuals use long-distance, patterned work journeys to gain individual and family stability in places where occupational resources are scarce. Walsh argued that broadening our analysis beyond the dichotomies of instability versus stability allows researchers to document the ways migration contributes to community, household, and individual stability *and* instability. She calls rural communities mobile communities, since migration is used as a mechanism to achieve stability in the home setting. Interestingly, she found that individuals who engaged in long-distance but

short turn-around migrations were no less likely to feel connected and contribute to their rural places as many who remained living in their rural communities full-time. Busy lives, rather than labour migrations, were more likely to confound rural community participation. 'Living here but working there' is demonstrative of Ungar's (2011) concept of atypicality in youths' resilience processes. Though it may involve taking risks and may appear counter-intuitive, it is nonetheless considered culturally acceptable and adaptive in rural Hants County where employment resources are limited or blocked.

Though the youth in the current study emphasized that it was predominantly males that utilized the process of 'living here but working there,' this is not to say that women do not participate in labour migration. Rather, their migration patterns may represent movements that do not conform to those predominantly recognized or studied. As Ulicki and Crush's (2000) argue in their research that looked at gender, farm work and women's migration from Lesotho to the New South Africa:

There are, of course, potential difficulties with any general argument about male inclusion and female exclusion from the migrant labour market. First, forms of female contract migration and wage employment that do not fit the binary picture may be overlooked. Second, men's and women's migrancy are not mutually exclusive. Their interaction should be given adequate attention at the level of household strategy and gender relations. Third, the gendered dynamics of regional labour markets and the associated redefinition of gender relations and roles, at home and away, need to be given serious explanatory weight (p. 65).

The findings from the current research are important, because they show that emotional and relational processes cannot be separated from the broader social, economic, political, and

power processes that shape the contexts within which youth are making migration decisions. Youths' out-migration from rural areas is not simply an accounting of equally weighed pros and cons of either staying or leaving, as implied by traditional push-pull migration models, or solely a matter of financial need, as inferred by economic theories of migration (de Haas, 2007). Indeed, a key understanding from this study is that the most impoverished youth are not those intending to out-migrate, as economic migration models would suggest (de Haas, 2007).

Very little of the resilience, migration and youth development literature has examined the role that youths' relationships with places play in their migration decisions. An important exception comes from Corbett (2007b), who calls for a more prominent focus on place and subjectivities in understanding rural youth out-migration, since place "serves as a backdrop for a set of internal processes and structures that shape the character of self-development" (p.786). In his three-year study of youths' educational decision making in a Nova Scotian coastal community, Corbett (2007b) determined that those youth mostly likely to migrate were 'school-successful floaters' with 'mobility capital.' They were able to negotiate multiple social spaces, had extended family connections outside the local area, had travel experience, and were comfortable speaking with teachers, elders, and those in power positions. The young people who remained in their rural communities were more likely to work in the traditional resource industries and possessed what he called localized capital. They had access to local social and work networks and were positioned to take advantage of economic assets like fishing quotas and gear. Corbett posited that families in different social and economic positions support different ways of seeing and experiencing place through the use of different child-rearing practices. Drawing from Lareau's (2003) natural growth theory, Corbett (2007b) argued that middle class child-rearing practices concentrate on concerted cultivation, which features adult mediation,

pedagogical direction, distant travel, literacy, and opportunities to learn from media-supported external perspectives. Working class child-rearing, on the other hand, is said to extend from the principles of natural growth, working intelligence, and unschooled forms of knowledge (Corbett, 2007b).

In the current research, youths' family experiences, place relationships, perceived obligations and responsibilities, and habituation into certain ways of thinking and responding to contextual challenges—all highly interconnected—produced variation in youths' values, goals, skills and inclinations, even within the same location. Youth were certainly active agents in their own lives, sculpting and striving toward their social, identity, educational, occupational, and residential goals. However, the relational and structural dynamics of youths' rural places were found to advance or restrict their ability to use particular learned capacities, embodied knowledges, and resources and supports to positively address the threats of rural economic decline and attain their needs and aspirations. These findings turn our attention to the ways in which resilience-promoting resources are differentially available and distributed to certain youth in contexts of adversity.

The experiences of the Systemically Strapped youth can be drawn upon to demonstrate how opportunities and resilience responses are structured by the systems in which youth are embedded. Over and over again, James struggled to take control of his life. By examining the social and physical ecologies of the individual *first* (Ungar, 2011), it became clear that for James, his scope for agency was limited by hurdles that were bound to his personal background, and to the social, structural, and institutional features of his rural environment. The system showed itself to be inadequate in helping him recuperate from past wounds; address his mental health challenges, provide him secure housing and employment; and allow him to transform what he

learned into strengths and skills that had a place in his community. His personal agency was only as good as the structural, institutional, and social conditions that facilitated his use of positive adjustments to improve the compatibility between himself and where he lived.

Some participants, however, were better situated to take advantage of new opportunities that became available through processes of community transformation, and some found ways to maintain systems and supports that continued to enrich their resilience capacities, albeit in different ways. These results confirm Evans' (2002) argument that agency and structural influences are interfused, or complexly bound, and play out in varying ways in the lives of different youth. Opportunities and resources are differentially distributed and garnered, depending on factors like youths' educational qualifications, gender, family relationships, subjectivities, aspirations and goals, background histories, personal strengths and qualities, whether they own a car, and their place relationships.

7.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research makes an important contribution to resilience theory by: 1) offering an empirical rendering of the way youths' relationships with their social, structural, and spatial ecologies affect their adaptive responses within economically strained rural environments; and 2) by accounting for the influence of macro-structural transformations on youth resilience in rural Atlantic Canadian communities.

7.3.1 A Contextually-Sensitive Understanding of Rural Youth Resilience

Resilience is often cited in the literature as “bouncing back” from shock (Smith, Tooley, Christopher, & Kay, 2010) or as one's ability to adapt to developmental risks (Luthar et al., 2000). The first definition implies that resilience involves returning to a former state following disturbances and fails to take into account that youth, their relationships with others, and their environments may be forever changed by the experience of stress and upheaval. Moreover, it ignores the very real possibility that in certain instances, personal or collective transformations may be required to ensure wellbeing. The second definition suggests that resilience lies in youths' adeptness for person-focussed adaptations. It speaks little to the ways that youth, their families, and communities improve or change their environments to produce a healthier fit between person and place. Nor does it adequately give attention to the importance of the opportunity structures within youths' environments that make youths' adjustments possible and meaningful (Ungar, 2012). In addition, it disregards that coping with crises may require the combination of multiple resilience processes, only some of which may be characterized by youth alterations. As shown in the current research, other responses may involve maintenance of familiar processes that continue to offer protection in tumultuous times. A contextually-sensitive understanding of youth resilience in rural Hants County emphasizes the interplay of processes

that occur between youth and the social, symbolic, spatial, and structural dimensions of their rural places as they mutually experience developmental, socio-political, economic, and relational transitions (Sameroff, 2010).

The findings from this study are significant because they indicate that resilience is found neither in the person nor the place, as definitions rooted in youths' abilities to succeed or in environmental risks and protective factors imply (Lerner et al., 2013). Rather, resilience involves a supportive and responsive relationship between the two that enables youth to respond to the burdens in their rural environments through processes of positive adjustment that improve youth-place compatibility, processes of negotiation or transformation that resolve incompatibility, and maintenance of systems that are considered compatible. As Ungar (2013) states, resilience is “the capacity of both individuals and their environments to interact in ways that optimize developmental processes” (p. 256).

Important comparisons and contrasts can be made between the substantive theory developed in the current study, which has at its centre the concept of youth-place compatibility, with relational developmental models and theories of person-environment fit. It is increasingly agreed among scholars that development occurs through complex, bi-directional interactions between multi-level and interdependent processes that occur within transactional individual, family, community, and socio-political systems (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Dawes & Donald, 2000; Didkowsky & Ungar 2010; Sameroff, 2009). The cutting edge in resilience research, however, is the argument that interactions between youth and their environments may allow for better developmental outcomes in disadvantaged environments when there is a fit between risk exposure, the qualities of the individual, and the capacity of the environment to respond to the individual's needs (Ungar, 2013).

Concepts of person-environment fit have most often been developed in relation to work environments and organizational behaviour (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards, 1996). Researchers have, for example, developed models of fit between environmental supplies and employee values, and between environmental demands and employee abilities in the workplace (Edwards, 1996). When the concept has been applied or redefined to make inferences about the relationship between people and their broader environments, it has mainly focused on the cognitive processes occurring in the individual. Kaplan (1983), for example, proposed a model of person-environment compatibility that, in contrast to the model I presented in the current work, uses as its starting point the individual's basic cognitive processes related to perception, attention, and planning. In Kaplan's model, person-environment compatibility occurs when the environment facilitates cognitive processes, purposive inclination, and action to accomplish goals. Environments that are distracting, coercive, over-stimulating, and thus, negatively affect mental processes and the ability to make and carry out plans are considered incompatible. In other words, person-environment incompatibilities have to do with conflicts between patterns of activity in one or more of the mental activity categories (images, reflection or inclinations/ action). Though he raises the issue of temporal flexibility, it is used to describe the individual's mental capacity to hold images and plans in the mind. It is not in reference to the ways individuals and contextual conditions change over time, consequently producing variations in goals, inclinations, and understandings of which routes may lead to wellbeing even within constrained or risky environments, as is the focus in this work.

More recently, the concept of person-environment fit has been reconceptualised for use in theories of youth resilience. Lerner and his colleagues (2013) make the case that resilience is a dynamic attribute of the relationship between the young person and their multilevel, integrated,

and relational developmental system that has adaptive significance. They stress the need for an analytical focus on “the nature of mutually influential individual-context relations, that is, the focus is on the ‘rules,’ the processes that govern exchanges between individuals and their contexts” (p.294). In the article, the authors explain that youths’ self-regulation is key to their optimal attainment of positive goals, as well as helps them compensate when goal-oriented behaviours are thwarted.

Ungar (2011; 2013) also emphasizes the interactional aspects of Environment x Individual in adaptive youth development when the youth is exposed to threats, but unlike Lerner and his colleagues (2013), he purposefully showcases the environment first in the equation to argue that environmental factors are of heightened importance over individual attributes in influencing the likelihood of resilience. In his social ecological model, Ungar (2011; 2012) stresses the protective and promotive processes beyond the individual that support youths’ use of culturally-valued resources and strategies to enhance wellbeing. He responds to the nature versus nurture debate, and by extension conjectures agency and structure in youths’ adaptive development, when he states, “the personal agency of individuals to navigate and negotiate for what they need is dependent upon the capacity and willingness of people’s social ecologies to meet those needs” (p. 256).

My research builds upon these theoretical foundations to investigate more deeply the multilevel and integrated youth-environment interactions that enable resilience in burdened rural contexts. The results address a major gap in the resilience literature. Despite the massive environmental, individual, socio-political, and economic alterations occurring in rural contexts, the impacts of these risks on rural youth development have not been well-examined (Matthews et al., 2000; McGrath, 2001). When first-voice perspectives of rural young people are taken into

account, we are struck by the realization that youths' constructions of *the spaces and places* in which they engage affect how they experience social change, understand resilience, and take action when opportunities and options are in the process of transformation.

Given that a number of theorists, like Giddens (1991) and Coleman (1993), argue that connections to place are no longer relevant in a globalized, mobile, and risk-based society (Beck, 1992), the finding that youths' diverse relationships with and within their rural places play such a prominent role in their responses to rural restructuring may seem surprising. Coleman (1993), for example, suggests that social networks based on kinship and place are now moot points since, "the stability of these structures ... has been destroyed by the same technological changes that allow mobility and facilitate the breaking of relations" (p. 9). According to Bauman (1992), "the urge for mobility, built into the structure of contemporary life, prevents arousal of strong affections for any of the places; places we occupy are no more that temporary stations" (p. 695). To the contrary, when rural youth from Hants County are asked what matters to them and how they thrive despite the challenges they face, we see that youths' experiences of macro-structural shifts are filtered through and shaped by their patterns of interaction with people, community institutions, and socio-cultural scripts that are themselves transforming and situated within interconnected rural and urban spaces (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). As Somers (1994) contends, social change occurs not through "...the evolution or revolution of one societal type to another, but by shifting relationships among the institutional arrangements and cultural practices that constitute one or more social settings" (p. 627). Through their social practices and relationships in and outside rural places, youth are exposed to new knowledge, alternate realities, and varying opportunities and social values. New opportunities, viewpoints, expectations, and values can be consumed, confronted, integrated or denied by young people, as broader socioeconomic and

political shifts close certain options while opening others. Thus, the notion of place has not lost its power for rural youth. Rather, the realization emerges that same places may hold different meanings for young people. As this research has documented, a wide spectrum of relationships between youth and their rural places exist, even within the same setting. Moreover, youths' affiliations with their rural places were far from settled or fixed, but instead were found to be continually (re)forming through their interchanges with the dynamic social, physical, and socio-political properties of their rural contexts. This is why the model of youth-place compatibility constructed from the current research depicts the quality of the youth-place relationship as a sliding scale. Likewise, youths' orientations toward staying or leaving their rural communities more closely resembled a continuum, shifting over time and space, rather than as a fixed position. These findings are important empirically because they make clear that instead of ignoring the notion of place altogether, we need to theorize on the ways spaces and places are (re)conceptualized and experienced as a result of social transformation and rural restructuring. This will undoubtedly, as Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue, compel us "to reconceptualise fundamentally the politics of community, solidarity, identity and cultural difference" (p. 9).

7.3.2 Linking Macro-Structural Transformations and Rural Youth Resilience

Only recently have theories of social and political change and youth resilience, which are complex areas of study in their own right, been tackled together (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000). This may be because, as Manzo (2003) states, "It is no small task to join the macrostructural approach taken by those who examine political-economic influences on people-place relationships with the individual level perspective, but this is necessary to move our understanding forward" (p. 57).

My research contributes to the theoretical knowledge in this area by illustrating how transformations and trends in global and domestic policies affect the lives of youth, their families, and their communities in rural Nova Scotia. This research documented, from the youths' perspectives, the risks they face in their rural places and traced these challenges back to the macro-structural transformations occurring from global to local levels in technological, political, ideological, and economic systems. As discussed above, these changes were found to simultaneously create threats significant enough to potentially compromise youths' adaptive development, while opening new opportunities for youths' positive development. Mortimer and Larson (2002) state that, "all of these macrostructural trends, in subtle and direct ways, are reshaping and reconstructing adolescence" (p.9). Mortimer and Larson note that these changes, "place a premium on youths' initiative, creativity and ability to navigate a multidimensional labyrinth of choices and demands" (p. 9).

Important examples of research exploring the impacts of rural restructuring on youth development come from Elder and Conger (Elder, 1974; Elder and Conger, 2000). Elder's research on the economic collapses in rural America in the 1930s (Elder, 1974) and Elder and Conger's (2000) study of the Great Farm Crisis in the 1980s examined longitudinally how social change influences youth and their family developmental pathways. Elder and Conger documented the consequences and risks associated with rural economic decline, but focussed on the protective individual, family, and community resources enabling youths' adaptive developmental trajectories. They showed that family relationships, social ties, apprenticeship forms of learning, cultural institutions, and ties that fostered positive identities helped youth as they navigated both normative and unexpected transitions. Their conclusions are supported in this research.

Resilience models that shine a spotlight on the complexity of youths' positive development in encumbered rural environments rebuff reductionist views that "pull apart facets of the integrated developmental system" (Lerner et al., 2013). Rather, the analysis conducted in the current research portrayed the interdependent and transactional nature of development for young people that comprises connections between environmental, social, economic, spatial, symbolic, and policy factors. This shift in focus illuminates how individual change intertwines with contextual transformations, which allows us to better identify how to support youths' capacity to draw upon and engage resilience-promoting resources over time as risks unfold.

In the upcoming chapter, I discuss the how the study's research findings can be used to inform rural policy and positive youth and community development.

CHAPTER 8 POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This research revealed the interdependent relations between young people and the social, environmental, economic, spatial, symbolic, and policy realms of their rural places. Youths' interpretations of their transactions with and within their rural places informed their constructions of self-place compatibility, their decisions about where to live, and the resilience processes they engaged to deal with risks associated with rural restructuring. The awareness that youths' encounters with and within places filter the ways they experience the effects of rural restructuring while also influencing the kinds of resilience processes available to them, has significant implications for the generation of rural policy and community interventions intended to foster youth resilience. It indicates the need for rural policy and intervention frameworks that focus on the notion of place and that account for culturally and contextually-embedded perspectives and goals.

I begin in section 8.2 by detailing how traditional macro-economic policy models that treat rural locations as homogenous serve to further disadvantage rural areas. I suggest that a shift to place-focussed rural policy and community development can better address the risks facing rural youth by: gathering and valuing context-specific knowledge; centering community (including youth) participation and ownership in planning, design and delivery; identifying and using place-based assets and strengths to address local problems; taking a proactive rather than reactive approach to community change; and creating multilevel, collaborative, government structures.

The study findings also suggest that rather than focussing on individual-level programming, we should be determining what kinds of environments optimize positive and responsive transactions between youth and their rural places. How can we build resilience-enabling rural places so that youth can access the resources they need to develop and accomplish their unique personal and collective goals, and make decisions harmonious with their personal and shared values? Based on youths' identification of resilience-promoting resources and conditions, I suggest in section 8.3 four key actions rural communities can take to enhance the lives and livelihoods of rural youth. These include: investing in rural services and infrastructure; creating equitable systems and access to opportunities; enabling youths' positive transition to post-secondary education or work; and supporting localization, innovation, and diversification to bolster the local economy.

8.2 PLACE-FOCUSSED RURAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT

It would be remiss to provide suggestions for ways in which policy changes could better foster resilience without pointing to the current policy and development frameworks that have spawned complex socio-economic and environmental disturbances in rural places that risk youths' positive development. Policy frameworks focussed on economic growth and production, in combination with liberalized trade agreements and transformations in technologies, have reduced the economic viability of family-based and localized systems of fishing, forestry, farming, and extraction (Fairbairn, 1998; Markey et al., 2008; Randall & Ironside, 1996). These alterations have spurred strains in rural areas, such as high rates of unemployment and youth out-migration, fraying community infrastructure, the deterioration of services, and environmental degradation (Dupuy et al., 2000; Halseth & Ryser, 2006; Stockdale, 2006). The environmental, social, and human costs of economic restructuring are largely unaccounted for in macro-economic approaches focused on trade and growth. As such, top-down, broad-based governmental approaches that view rural areas as homogenous are insufficient to deal with the complex issues facing young people in rural areas. Indeed, youth participants expressed frustration that government policies and investments are urban-centric, de-prioritize the concerns of rural citizens, and show systemic disregard of rural places. This research instead points to the need for policies and strategies that demonstrate a keen awareness of the local history, perspectives and objectives of the people living in rural Hants County.

Place-based policy and development frameworks, in contrast to top-down models, focus on designing and building places that promote quality of life for residents. Planning, design, and implementation of interventions rely on context-specific knowledge; emphasize local actors as key participants, creators, and owners of community development processes; draw on the assets

and strengths of the place; take a proactive rather than reactive approach to community change; and involve collaborations among multi-level governments and community members. The principles of place-based policy and development are echoed in other systems of endogenous development (Pezzini, 2001), including new regionalism (Markey et al., 2008) and asset-based community development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). They can be mobilized to strengthen the collective power of communities to deal with rural transformations and disadvantages. According to Mathie and Cunningham (2003), community-based models: address the economic and social conditions of people's lives; initiate and strengthen the various forms of organizing at a local level for effective control over livelihood; link local initiatives to regional, national, and global institutions that further local level interests; and lead to a restructuring of economic and political systems that prioritize community interests. This type of approach acknowledges that rural areas are dynamic and far from homogenous (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Pezzini, 2001).

People in rural places, in partnership with policymakers, can identify and implement programs tailor-made for the issues and features of a particular municipality or region by implementing the following principles:

Gather and value context-specific knowledge: Place-based policy and development frameworks rely on the knowledge, experience, and participation of local actors who are familiar with the dynamics of the location. Their familiarity may allow them to better identify and rally community assets to address local issues (Markey et al. 2008; Pezzini, 2001). Bradford (2005) suggests that three kinds of local knowledge will help guide community-based practitioners and policy makers as they set priorities. Though he focuses on urban places, his arguments are applicable to rural settings. These include: knowledge *of* communities, garnered from policy clients' or residents' lived experiences; knowledge *about* communities, which includes statistical

data disaggregated to the local scale, research regarding population health, poverty, labour and service availability, and inventories of assets; and knowledge *for* changing communities, which includes policy and development, technical expertise and tools. Experiential and tactical knowledge, technical expertise, place-specific data, and models of community-driven planning and action are simultaneously garnered and utilized.

Centre community participation and ownership: In place-based models, local individuals, groups, and institutions take an active role in addressing local issues. Community members represent their own viewpoints and further their own causes, which may create an increased sense of ownership (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

Identify place-based assets, resources and strengths: An asset-based approach to rural development aims to uncover the obvious, as well as bring to light resources available in the place that have been taken for granted or hidden (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). These resources include human abilities, strengths, and talents, as well as the social, natural, and economic capital present in a community. Communities can link these assets in unexpected ways to augment the positive development of rural communities and youth living there. A focus on place exposes a range of resources, while also inspiring “a sense that those assets are local and may be used for local purposes” (Markey et al., 2008, p. 411).

Take a proactive rather than reactive approach to community change: People in rural places can deliberately focus on building community capacity to anticipate, withstand the effects of, and even flourish amidst macro-structural transformations. The concentration is on processes of self-generated change (Pezzini, 2001), and prevention of harmful outcomes, rather than solely reacting to external shocks (Skerratt, 2013). Self-generated change encourages a “proactive role for the citizen, replacing the passive, dependent role of client in the welfare service delivery

model of community development practice” (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, p. 7). It involves developing a long-term, strategic, shared vision that is flexible enough to handle changing circumstances. Optimally, this vision and the related objectives account for the diversity in the area and allow for a range of viewpoints.

Create collaborative governance structures: Networks between local governance structures and traditional governments improves the ability of rural places to implement interventions that work (Markey et al., 2008). Rural places can purposefully encourage new relationships between private and public enterprises, cultural institutions, various levels and departments of government, and youth partners. By developing new partnerships, people from a range of backgrounds and standpoints together create policies, programs, and services meant to promote youth and community wellbeing. Bradford (2005) explains that these collaborations may take both horizontal and vertical forms. He states, “Horizontally, government departments represented in local projects need to join-up their interventions for a seamless continuum of supports responsive to the unique conditions on the ground. Upper level governments must also work with and through local partnerships, enabling them to revitalize their communities on terms of their own choosing, while also guarding against greater disparity between places” (p.vi). Government policy makers may play multiple roles, such as by providing technical expertise regarding substantive policy development, or as facilitators of, participants in, drivers of, or catalysts for collaborative governance (Bradford 2005). Indeed, governments are increasingly recognizing that place-based policy and development can help realize provincial and national objectives (Markey et al., 2008; Pezzini, 2001). However, as Bradford warns, rural places must be careful that the obligations and costs of community development are not completely offloaded

onto the communities themselves. Like Markey and his colleagues suggest, “having a vision without the adequate means for implementation is counterproductive” (p. 417).

Collaborative governance requires commitment from all players, transparency, shared and informed decision making, prioritization of objectives, and uniting frameworks to enhance its coordination, coherence, and effectiveness (Jones, 2011; Pezzini, 2001). Otherwise, unintended consequences may arise from place-based development, including: coordination challenges, individuals or groups that take advantage of powerful positions, disregard of social equity or environmental stability, place stigmatization, and cultural divides between nearby areas (Bradford, 2005). Bradford warns that over-reliance on place-based policy could draw attention away from the very real risks facing communities that originate in structural forces external to the place. He suggests that policy and programming needs to:

...ensure that spatially-targeted approaches are linked to, and supported by, wider ‘aspatial’ or generally available, often universal, policies for health, social assistance, employment, innovation, and the like. It follows that general redistributive taxation and expenditure measures for income support, child care, health care, and educational opportunity remain essential to the quality of life in local places. Federal and provincial investments in these general public services are critical for preventing social polarization and spatial segregation in municipalities (p. 9).

It is therefore critical that in addition to initiating place-based strategies, changes must also occur to current macro-economic policy models focussed on economic growth. This will require a development paradigm shift, where rural places are viewed as more than just locations for resource extraction, and where policies are built on the recognition that socio-political, economic, environmental, and human development are interdependent.

8.3 BUILDING RESILIENCE- ENABLING RURAL ENVIRONMENTS

As these findings showed, youths' positive development is shaped both by the resources available in their rural places, and by the dynamic ways their environments function to allow access and meaningful use of these resilience-promoting resources and processes. Rural communities can foster youth resilience by creating supportive environments that make wellbeing resources and opportunities available, and enable youth to fairly and meaningfully use these resources and supports to meet their wellbeing needs and aspirations.

What processes are involved in creating a resilience-enabling rural environment? The study's findings reveal four key actions that could be engaged by policy makers and rural communities to amplify the positive transactions between youth and place. These include: investing in rural services and infrastructure; creating equitable systems and access to opportunities; enabling youths' positive transition to post-secondary education or work; and supporting localization, innovation, and diversification to bolster the local economy.

8.3.1 Investing in Rural Services and Infrastructure

Markey and his colleagues (2008), as well as Ryser and Halseth (2006), argue that services play a vital stabilizing role in rural areas undergoing economic restructuring, because they entice businesses and people to the area, and support the wellbeing of people already living there. Markey and his team (2008) push for a shift in the mindset, where facilities, quality education, infrastructure, and technologies are viewed as investments to be leveraged to recruit other economic opportunities and skilled young people to rural places. As Halseth and Ryser (2006) state:

The loss of services, on even an incremental basis, can have a significant impact on local quality of life and the availability of places to hold or attract economic development. As a result, services are crucial in the new rural economy where they also provide a foundation for the creation of social capital to support flexible and innovative bottom up approaches to community and economic renewal. These findings with respect to local reductions and regional concentration will have an impact upon local resiliency (p. 86).

In the current study, youth explicitly talked about the resources, structures, and support systems that they felt enabled them to cope with hardships. They also made concrete suggestions for enhancing the conditions within their rural places. Participants' opinions about which services and programs were lacking in their rural places provide good starting points to know which investments may hold the most sway in supporting the positive development of youth who stay, and in enticing youth out-migrants back to the area. The findings indicated that improvements are needed in three key areas: transportation infrastructure; recreation and social spaces; and safety and health services.

Transportation infrastructure and innovation: Youth reported that transportation is the most significant challenge of living rurally. Being mobile is a resilience strategy that enables them to access a variety of work, educational, and other resources. However, those without vehicles depend on other people or miss out on opportunities. Travel entails daily time and financial burdens. Indeed, the burgeoning literature on the sociology of transportation increasingly acknowledges that transportation systems have intersecting economic, environmental, *and* social impacts (Geurs & Van Wee, 2004; Markovich & Lucas, 2011).

Statistic Canada's (2002, as cited in Savelson, Colman, Litman, Walker, & Parmenter, 2006) household spending data showed that when road transportation costs (including vehicle

ownership and operating costs, transit fares, and out-of-pocket parking expenses) were averaged across every Nova Scotian person (regardless of whether they owned a car), transportation costs were \$3,036 per capita. In 2006, the Genuine Progress Index Atlantic (See Savelson et al., 2006) provided evidence that these transportation costs were only the tip of the iceberg. When ‘invisible’ costs, like travel time and climate change costs and road facility expenditures, to name a few, were included, there were an additional \$4,562 in indirect travel costs per Nova Scotian. It is presumed here that out-of-pocket expenses for rural people in Shore Central are much higher, since they have limited to no access to public transportation options.

Youth in the current study also emphasized that daily mobility on poor roads and through dangerous conditions presents a considerable safety risk. Their safety concerns are well-founded, considering nearly 23 percent of motor vehicle fatalities are 15-to-24 year olds. Even though this age group makes up only 13 percent of the Canadian population, one in five deaths of people younger than 30 result from motor vehicle accidents, and approximately 60 percent of fatal collisions take place on rural roads (Transport Canada, 2010). Rural people are much more likely to die or be injured in motor vehicle accidents, whether on rural or urban roads (Transport Canada, 2009). Transport Canada suggests that this can be explained by the extra time and distances they travel on high-speed highways.

Economic constraints and long distances between locations in rural Shore Central challenge the development of a public transportation system. Transport Canada (2010) states that due to population and employment decline in rural areas the local property tax base is weaker, which means that road repairs and safety improvements tend to take priority over investments in public transportation initiatives. A focus on the development of potential rural assets and transportation solutions at the community level may be a first step to meeting the travel needs of

residents. Youth participants mentioned that they already car-pool informally when possible. A more formalized system of volunteer-oriented transport could be a potential on-the-ground option for rural areas like Shore Central to meet their transportation needs. In Genuine Progress Index Atlantic's youth transportation work, researchers (Didkowsky et al., 2014) uncovered several ridesharing and technology innovations that may provide potential transportation solutions for rural areas like Shore Central. Solutions include: organized carpooling and ridesharing systems that have the potential to link to online, social media, or smart phone technologies; approved driver services, where drivers apply, are screened, and certified to provide paid services, which respond to real-time requests for rides; e-hailing, where users can call taxis or licensed off-hours fleets (i.e. town cars, limos, etc.); aggregation/comparison smart phone applications, which collect, aggregate, and compare different ridesharing options available in the area; speciality services, where people are offered free rides home from participating venues or at certain times of the year, like Christmas; and peer to peer rental services, where community residents can rent their automobile to other residents. Indeed, transportation services could be an area of innovative business development in rural Hants County, perhaps even owned and operated by young people themselves.

Recreation and social spaces: All youth communicated that their rural places lack recreational options and facilities to suit a wider variety of interests. All youth reported that their rural communities were missing things to do and places to go, because very few, if any, public social spaces, restaurants, open community hubs, and sports facilities exist locally. With limited public social spaces, youth often use their cars as social sites, make their own fun, or stay home. Having places to go, where they can interact with peers and community members, can forge for rural youth a sense of belonging, provide them with opportunities to form their own identities,

and connect them with informal supports and ties to resources (Trell et al., 2012). Indeed, participants emphasized the social skills they learned and friendships they formed through coordinated and competitive sports, volunteering in the community, and through involvement in 4H and church youth groups. 4H is a program that offers youth the opportunity to participate in projects and build skills, which range from horticulture and livestock to photography and public speaking.

Rural communities wishing to nurture positive youth development may consider developing programs where youth can meaningfully participate and socialize with others. The following suggestions made by participants in rural Shore Central are pertinent. They suggested that programs be created that cater to the interests of different kinds of youth, not just those interested in sports. A peer-support program focused on anti-bullying was advised. They requested that communities finish the projects they started, like the winter skating rink half completed in one youths' area. *All* youth mentioned the value of building a central recreation centre with transportation support or shuttles to get them there. They recognized that the low population in Hants County and the high costs of building a recreation centre might be unfeasible, so they suggested that old schools that were shut down through consolidation processes could be repurposed as recreational and social spaces for youth. They thought the current high school gym could be made available to youth after hours, and these activities could be monitored by community volunteers.

Security and health care services: Youth were more likely to portray their rural places in a positive light when they felt safe in their environments and when they felt there were adequate services (like emergency medical services, police, fire departments, and health care facilities) to keep them and their loved ones feeling secure. Some youth expounded upon the security, trust,

and familiarity they felt in their rural areas; but others discussed experiences of harassment, vandalism, and robbery within their communities. They suggested an added police presence would help prevent community problems, as well as help curb the frequency of drinking and driving. Youth discussed the essential role of the volunteer fire departments in their local areas. They noted the need for new equipment, more volunteers, and access to quick emergency care. A recent development to the area has been the addition of a local police detachment.

Family, community members, and friends were found to play an important role in buffering the negative effects of rural restructuring for youth. In this research setting, the concept of family was fluid, and often included large extended families and community relationships. For the Systemically Strapped youth, for example, emotional, physical, and financial support provided by his community helped offset repeated long-term unemployment, lack of education and training, significant financial strain, and encounters with homelessness. It is evident that we must take care to ensure the health and security of youths' primary sources of support in order to protect the most marginalized youth against the deleterious effects of socioeconomic strain and stress.

The threats facing families that youth most often brought up in their interviews included addiction and alcoholism, chronic illness, and financial strain. These are also key issues the Rawdon Hills Community Health Centre (RHCHC) and the Hants Community Access Network aim to address. The RHCHC is a non-profit, integrated primary health care centre that aims to be responsive to the needs of people from the surrounding area. The Hants Community Access Network provides supports to people with disabilities or barriers that prevent their inclusion in community activities, by offering employment support services and door-to-door accessible transportation. In April 2015, the RHCHC invited community members from a variety of

backgrounds, including police, health care workers, youth advocates, researchers, municipality representatives, teachers, and youth care workers, to discuss what the RHCHC Association can do to address the gaps that remain in the health care services of rural Hants County. The health, safety, and service issues raised by youth in the current study were purposefully brought to the RHCHC focus group and the following themes were prioritized for development of local services: 1) transportation for youth, seniors, and marginalized populations, so that they may access a variety of programs and services, and potentially help prevent drinking and driving; 2) access to after-hours care and emergency services; 3) supports for youth, including developing opportunities for engagement, safe gathering places, access to public health, family counseling, and resources for young families (early teen pregnancy was highlighted as a key challenge for health services in this area of Hants County); and 4) adequate communication systems to increase the awareness of services and programs already offered to residents of the area. Though no youth were present at the discussion (which presents a flaw and an opportunity for future improvement), the collaborative approach taken by the RHCHC may help create a longer lasting impact because the needs and strengths of the community were determined by community members themselves. In the meeting, the RHCHC announced that, based on the significant need identified within the surrounding communities, they had recently submitted proposals seeking funding to provide services for mental health, with particular emphasis on youth services, addictions services, and coordination. The addition of counseling and mental health services to this rural area would be beneficial, as well as bolstering supports and social sites to enable processes of self-exploration, self-awareness, and positive identity development.

Other key concerns health care providers and services need to consider are the cultural and contextual dynamics of rural places that may prevent youth and their families from using the

services, even if they are available and accessible. As one youth noted, even if addiction support centres were available locally she was unsure whether her family members would go because of privacy concerns. These are the essential details that policy makers and service providers miss out on when they fail to include youth in policy and planning discussions. Policy makers and service providers in rural places may need to consider new ways of making public services available that are culturally and contextually sensitive.

8.3.2 Creating Equitable Systems and Access to Opportunities

The research findings underscore that it is not enough to just provide services or enhance community assets. In addition, we need to consider how power differences, competing discourses, youths' background and characteristics, and community structures intersect to differentially affect awareness of, and access to, resilience-promoting resources for different groups of youth. Ungar (2013) argues that cultural elites like politicians, mental health professionals, and the media have the most influence in determining the social discourse regarding positive development outcomes for youth. These perspectives may be brought into focus when a cultural lens is engaged or when researchers and policy makers give credence to the contextually and culturally-embedded standpoints of rural youth and their communities. Foucault (1981) reminds us that, "...discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle" (p. 52-53). Hook (2001), likewise, explains:

Indeed, one needs only briefly consider the complexity of the mutually-beneficial and interdependent relationship of the material and the discursive in the operation of power to be aware that discourse often appears as both *instrument* and *result* of power, as both its antecedent and its off-shoot. (Discourse facilitates and endorses the emergence of certain

relations of material power, just as it justifies these effects after the fact. Similarly, material arrangements of power enable certain speaking rights and privileges, just as they lend material substantiation to what is spoken in discourse) (p. 33).

Youth participants' discussions revealed some of the structural barriers, discourses of power, and social practices that challenged them as they negotiated for resilience-promoting resources. They pinpointed benefits enjoyed by people in urban areas that were less accessible to them because of their lack of familiarity with urban systems, the unavailability of local public transportation options, and due to limited funds. They contrasted their understandings of what it means to live well and thrive with those values they believed typical in urban areas, noting that government policies prioritized urban issues and perspectives. Youth also identified community practices and discourses that inhibited their desire to take part or use local services. For example, everyone knowing everyone, informal community monitoring, and the practice of gossiping left some youth feeling suffocated and excluded. They distanced themselves from community members and social opportunities, and felt they needed to self-monitor so as not to become the brunt of gossip. These social practices influenced some youth to avoid going to the local medical centre for fear of privacy breaches. Participants argued that adults' recreational concerns were prioritized over youths' and that some attempts at voicing their opinions about how to improve their communities were ignored by adults. Politics of place certainly influenced some participants' decisions to leave their rural places.

With these kinds of issues in mind, place-based policies and interventions need to identify the discourses and claims to resources reinforced by community 'rules', institutions, and social practices (Jones, 2011). Policies and programs can then be developed that focus on breaking down the barriers and power structures that serve to reinforce economic, social, gender,

geographical, and other inequities. Since material and operational control are contained within the social practices and discourses within which young people are embedded, roles and relations in the community may need to be redefined as part of the strategy to address youth marginalization (Evans, 2002). As Ungar (2013) states, “For individuals who are coping with highly adverse family and community contexts, individually focussed interventions are less likely to foster well-being than interventions that first mitigate exposure to risk factors like violence, poverty, and social marginalization” (p. 263).

In addition to fair access to integral assets and opportunities, rural places and governments must include youth equitably in decision-making processes that affect their wellbeing. Rural youth, typically excluded from research and community development agendas, must be called upon for their knowledge as equal partners.

8.3.3 Enabling Youths’ Positive Transition to Post-Secondary Education or Work

Youth in this study recalled trepidations about making vital life-course decisions after high school. These tensions were the result of the acute awareness that obtaining post-secondary education would require leaving their rural communities or driving daily to more urban centres. Likewise, youth noted that secure employment options were something to be found elsewhere. Their concerns are understandable, considering these decisions set the stage for their future challenges, successes, and life trajectories.

The participants displayed incredible agency in mobilizing their personal, family, and community assets to plot a course and gain entry into post-secondary educational and career realms. There were striking disparities, however, between youth who were enabled to navigate educational and occupational pathways of interest to them, and those who struggled to access

financial and social career-supports. Youth who went on to post-secondary education were differentially positioned to take advantage of high-quality, better paying work opportunities. Those without adequate training or educational credentials floundered to find work locally or accepted minimum wage positions. Youths' narratives showed that getting an education past high school had numerous other benefits that extended beyond preparing them for the labour market. These impacts included building new capacities, becoming better communicators, gaining confidence, recognizing their own abilities, making new connections, visiting other places, opening themselves to alternate worldviews, and learning about new opportunities for work or socializing. The findings support McGrath's (2001) argument that young people who are excluded from the education system are consequently made vulnerable due to their diminished capacity to participate in the labour market. Without a positive transition from high school to post-secondary education or work, youth may experience compounded negative effects, such as difficulties establishing independent lives or being able to afford housing and transportation. These multiple concerns were certainly demonstrated through the case of the Systemically Strapped youth.

In contrast, facilitative environments provide youth opportunities to develop their capacities and potential through informal and formal learning programs and thriving work placements. In this section, I discuss ways in which rural places can enable a positive transition from high school to post-secondary education or work for young people. I focus on three areas, which include: developing contextually and culturally-relevant educational content in schools; constructing contextually and culturally-sensitive educational methods to meet a variety of learning styles and needs; and offering training opportunities in rural places.

Developing contextually and culturally-relevant educational content in schools:

According to Looker and Naylor (2009) and Corbett (2005) the predominant discourse of post-secondary school pathways is built upon taken-for-granted connections between education, achievement, and mobility out of rural areas. Corbett (2005) calls youths' impetus to leave a migration imperative, where youth are taught implicitly and explicitly that they need to leave their rural homes if they hope to be successful in life. He explains that educational systems in rural areas systematically sort and select the highest achievers for out-migration. The more education young people acquire, the less likely they are to stay in their rural communities (Looker & Naylor, 2009). Most certainly, the connection between education and the out-migration from rural places is an essential one to make. If we were to account for what positive transitions look like for young people who want to stay in their rural communities, we might need to redefine the content of school curricula and the messages teachers and parents relay about what it takes to be successful. This shift in focus would require answering the following questions: Are the outputs of the formal education system related to desired processes and outcomes of fostering rural youth resilience and creating flourishing rural communities? Are youth learning what they need to know to support their transitions following high school, whether they decide to stay or to leave? What do youth need to know in terms of preparing for changing socio-political contexts? If we focussed on multiple types of positive transitions such as those demonstrated by the youth in this project, what might the content look like in high schools?

The specific nature of content that could be integrated into course curriculums would depend on cultural and situational factors. It is suggested, based on youths' varying experiences in rural Hants County, that youth need to be prepared to meet complex demands and challenges

that occur in a wide variety of situations. According to Takanishi (2000), however, very rarely do school-to-work interventions aim to prepare youth for future life challenges that are associated with social change or socio-political upheaval. Takanishi argues that interventions need to give greater attention to building the capacity of youth to deal with uncertainty, identify and solve complex problems, and behave ethically in their relationships. She recommends interventions and educational programs focussed on life skills development, decision making, coping skills, and interpersonal skills. Indeed, some youth in the current project noted the challenges they face in understanding alternate socio-cultural and infrastructure systems, such as those in urban centres. Some spoke of the discomfort they felt when initially communicating with people from other locations.

Takanishi (2000) points to research synthesis conducted by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995, as cited in Takanishi, 2000), *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century* project. They suggest that two learning categories are essential for preparing adolescents for transitions into adulthood in shifting contexts. The first category includes survival skills and conditions that are enduring, regardless of the situation, like experiencing sustained, caring relationships, or developing social competence and life skills. These suggestions were found to be true in the current context. Youth in this project were found to be better able to build competencies that help them through the transition from high school to postsecondary education or work in a shifting economic context, when they have: support from extended family ties, relationships with community members, access to education and work networks, exposure to positive role models, guidance in navigating alternate socio-cultural (work and educational) discourses, and opportunities to engage in activities that develop their educational and work-place skills.

The second category suggested by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995, as cited in Takanishi, 2000) comprises skills that are considered at a premium for preparing youth to succeed in a globalized economy, including: building youths' technical and analytical capabilities for a technological and knowledge rich international economy; inspiring motivation for life-long learning; teaching flexibility regarding work responsibilities; instilling values to live peacefully amongst diverse ethnic groups and cultures; and providing the tools so youth have the ability to live with uncertainty and change.

In the current research context, the following skills and capacities were drawn upon by youth to aid their positive transition from high school to university or the workplace, despite the challenges they face. It is expected that other youth could benefit from social interventions or school classes that integrate skill development around these areas: knowing how to create and carry out organizational strategies, including setting goals, making plans, and preparing for changing situations; recognizing and developing personal strengths; knowing how to cope with work or school stresses and overloads; choosing career paths that speak to them; and generating multiple career pathways in order to prepare for changing circumstances. Youth suggested also that improvements could be made in supporting youth to fill out student loan and scholarship applications. Other helpful social interventions for the current context could include courses on long-term financial planning and budgeting.

Constructing contextually and culturally-sensitive educational methods: It was evident from youths' discussions that different kinds of young people learn best using very different learning styles. The Tactical Maneuverers, for example, emphasized that they were practical, hands-on learners, who preferred apprenticeship-style models of learning. The Opportunity Strivers spoke of the need for quality, education courses that go over and above the basics, and

the need for individuals to put effort into studying in order to succeed. Community Builders stressed the role of experiential learning in their development. The Systemically Strapped youth had learning difficulties, but was without access to educational supports to meet his needs following high school. In order to support the learning of diverse groups of young people, the blending of multiple learning methods is advised.

It is obvious from youths' discussions that learning takes place not only in the classroom, but in informal ways, such as through experiential learning with parents and grandparents, by watching community members succeed and following in their footsteps, by reaching out to mentors, by volunteering in the community and applying those skills to other areas of their lives, and via the media. Communities or schools can draw on those informal connections and social strengths of the community to link individuals to opportunities. Education could emphasize local knowledge, mentorship, and learning from community members. Exploratory classes and service-learning models would allow youth to "try out" various occupational paths, while also allowing youth to contribute to their communities. Interestingly, youth participants noted that classes based on experiential learning and co-op style models were invaluable for helping them develop workplace skills and decide upon their career paths. Just a few years ago, the local high school started a new program that promoted youth involvement in community organizations or businesses for class credit. One youth, for example, had the opportunity to try his hand at plumbing for his Options and Opportunity course. His volunteer work for a company helped him realize he enjoyed plumbing work. Another youth said his experiences in a Grade 11 Co-op class confirmed for him that he should follow in his father's footsteps and embark on a career in trade work. Likewise, youth studying a trade were particularly pleased with their educational experiences, stating that the apprenticeship model helped them bridge the gap between school

and work. Through an apprenticeship, youth received on-site job training, were able to model various roles, and were assisted in finding future employment opportunities through work placements and through the schools' networks. If not already available, high school co-op programs could be implemented for youth interested in exploring careers in sciences, academia, community development, technology and medicine, among other fields.

Offering training opportunities in rural places: Many of the participants indicated they would take classes or go to college locally if the opportunity was available. Rural places can strategically develop education, training, and capacity building programs locally that help youth develop a wide range of skills that support their transition to further education or the workplace. Accredited college or university (as well as informal) programs could be designed specifically to develop the human capacity to meet the needs at the community or regional level. Local individuals could be trained, supported, and hired, which would potentially reduce underemployment in the area. Of course, without the development of new economic sectors or different ways of engaging and providing support to young people in rural areas, training youth for local opportunities would be for naught.

Youth emphasized several positive aspects in their rural places that they felt worked well to support their efficacy to enter educational realms and the workforce. Teachers, counsellors, and other community allies connected young people to important financial and psychosocial resources. The youth participants who reported volunteering in their communities, and who also felt their contributions were valued, spoke of the instrumental and psychosocial benefits they received in return. These benefits include a sense of belonging, the rewarding feeling of helping others, speaking their opinions, and learning skills they could use at work or in other relationships. They spoke about knowing a broader range of people to turn to for support. Not

every participant said volunteering is important to them, but every youth spoke of the personal fulfillment associated with being included and participating across various areas of their life (for example, helping one's family, or being completely engaged when with friends). These findings support the suggestion of Ryser, Manson and Halseth (2013) that youth will benefit when rural communities encourage youth involvement in collective decision-making and civic engagement. They argue this is especially true in locations where restructuring has removed many of the former avenues for youth to develop social and work-place skills.

The experiences of the Systemically Strapped youth showed that receiving workplace training is not enough to ensure the successful transition of rural youth to gain employment. Though he participated in a government-funded employment program, which was an important training asset located approximately 30 to 40 minutes away from the research area, the participant had other unaddressed issues that constrained his ability to secure long-term employment. Supporting young people to remain and live well in rural areas also requires building a flourishing local economy, investing in rural services and infrastructure, and creating equitable systems.

8.3.4 Building a Flourishing Local Economy

In this study, youth emphasized the impossibility of finding well-paid, career-focussed employment in their geographical area. Even resource-based work, which used to be an option for previous generations, has become increasingly unviable. With little diversification in available employment options, and few *career* opportunities, participants used various mechanisms to access the economic resources required to survive. Most of these resilience processes took youth away from their rural communities on a day-to-day or bi-weekly basis. More specifically, Community Builders, Tactical Maneuverers, and Opportunity Strivers used

daily mobility to reach work placements in more urban areas of the province. In addition, Tactical Maneuverers intended to take advantage of thriving work opportunities in other provinces. The Opportunity Strivers were willing to leave their rural communities to explore career options in other places. Only the Systemically Strapped youth remained searching for work in his community. His potential for seeking work elsewhere was limited by his mental health issues, lack of education and training, and his occasional dependence on family members for transportation. The participants also built their economic base by adopting informal methods, like living off the land and trading time for resources. The relational and structural aspects of youths' places fostered or prevented the use of certain avenues to overcome the paucity of economic and occupational resources. As noted previously, disparities were documented in youths' ability to draw upon integral social, mobility, psychological, and financial resources as they made adaptations to deal with the threat of rural economic decline.

In resilience-enabling environments, the pressure of adapting to threat is not placed solely on individuals' backs. According to Jones (2011), in order for communities to foster resilience and cope with changing circumstances, the communities themselves need to have adaptive capacity. She argues that dynamic and resilient systems foster innovation, so existing community processes can alter or new community practices can be adopted to respond to challenges. Three areas of focus in the rural development literature may be applicable to fostering economic revitalization in rural Hants County: localization, innovation, and diversification (Markey et al., 2008; Pezinni, 2001; Randall & Ironside, 1996; Hanavan & Cameron, 2012).

Localization: The aim of localization is to meet the needs of places through local human, infrastructure, service, and economic development (Hanavan & Cameron, 2012; Talberth et al.,

2006). An additional benefit is reducing the vulnerability of rural places to global shifts and macro-structural restructuring (Pezzini, 2001). Talberth and his colleagues (2006) explain that:

Economic localization brings production of goods and services closer to their point of consumption, reducing the need to rely on long supply chains and distant markets so that communities and regions can, for the most part, provision themselves. While it is certainly not possible to produce every kind of good and service locally, economic localization seeks to restore an efficient balance between local production and imports that reduces local economic vulnerability and minimizes the negative social and environmental externalities of inefficient trade (p. 2).

Indeed, youth spoke of the importance of having options for safe, healthy, and inexpensive food locally. They pinpointed services and resources, as discussed above, that would help nurture their quality of life. However, with occupational resources located so far away, youth also reported that they tended to spend money on groceries and services outside of the community. Economic localization reduces the need for long distance work commutes and transport of goods. The processes involved in advancing economic localization include taking account of the area's needs and potential, and then investing in their own resources and services (Pezzini, 2001). These decisions happen with the say and effort of rural people in partnership with multi-level governance structures. If youth had closer options, they could potentially spend more of their money locally, which in turn would help kick-start the local economy.

An example of building on community strengths and knowledge in a process of localization comes from Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia (Hanavan & Cameron, 2012). In Tatamagouche, community members crafted place-based solutions to gain control over their food production and consumption systems. These locally controlled civic agriculture and alternative

food networks prioritize quality over quantity; depend upon the context-specific wisdom and actions of community members; and remove the middle-men between farmers and consumers. So far, community members have successfully initiated civic agriculture productions, a farmers' market, a Community Land Trust, a new school garden project, a local currency system, and have supported knowledge sharing and training for a community of organic and sustainable farming practitioners. In doing so, they have witnessed improvements in community volunteerism, socioeconomic wellbeing, and social capital.

However, as Halseth and Ryser (2006) caution, there is evidence from the literature that the proximity of certain rural locales to larger centres that host more services and products has an effect on whether people will bypass a local supplier for a nearby larger centre when the cost of goods is perceived to be less expensive than those offered locally. The authors suggest this issue requires further research, as well as consideration of innovative policy, delivery, and service models that encourage buying locally. The 'That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program' (see <http://www.tenriversfoodweb.org/>) in Oregon, United States, is an initiative that aims to improve the ability of low-income residents to buy healthy, local food, while channeling federal support to small, local farmers. The program originated as a partnership between congregations and Ecumenical Ministries in Oregon, but was adopted by the Ten Rivers Food Web in 2011. The program provides incentives for low-income residents to support local farmers through the use of SNAP (or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program cards, formerly known as food stamps) cards. After a minimum purchase of \$6 at participating farmer's markets, customers receive an additional \$6 in tokens that can be redeemed at a farmer's market. Moreover, the program offers to expand customers' purchasing power significantly by increasing the financial benefits a card user can gain each month. If a customer uses the card at a farmer's market each week of the

month, they will receive an additional \$24 in benefits. Though perhaps not directly applicable in rural Hants County, the idea of creating incentives and awareness programs for supporting local businesses is important and relevant to the research context.

Innovation: As demonstrated using the example of the ‘That’s My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program,’ innovation is required to produce locally-based solutions for the challenges associated with rural restructuring and to reintroduce economic vigour and opportunity into rural areas. Innovations may include creating new revenue streams, re-bundling traditional assets in new ways (Markey et al., 2008), finding market niches, and enticing people and businesses to the area based on features the area can offer (Stockdale, 2006). Nelson, Duxbury and Murray (2013), build upon the work of Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris (2007), to discuss four types of culturally-based strategies for rural development: 1) *entrepreneurial strategies* generate economic activity using a proactive, market-driven approach to business development; 2) *amenity strategies* shift the focus from drawing tourists to rural areas to promoting quality of life amenities to encourage in-migration; 3) *social strategies* take a progressive, grassroots approach to bolstering the social capital in rural areas through support of social networks and initiatives; and 4) *ecological strategies* focus on developing smaller-scale economic activity through internal cooperation that is externally competitive in regional, national, or international markets.

In rural Hants County, residents have a number of ecological, social, and human resources to build upon and promote (many of these assets are identified in a Hants County Asset and Resource Map, developed for the Hants Regional Development Authority by Pyra Management Consulting Services in 2012). The close proximity to the natural environment and the sense of freedom gained from the physical space could be promoted, since natural resources are more than mere products for extraction. Bullock (2013) describes the necessity in shifting

rural climates for local, state, and industry actors to work together to collectively reframe forest identities and the culture of resource dependence. Bullock discusses the challenges and opportunities of reconciling old and new identities in order to develop alternative forest products and non-conventional economic opportunities. Likewise, Stoddart (2013) speaks about the shift from using natural resources in an extractive economy, to reconfiguring the cultural landscape for building ‘attractive’ or ‘experience-based’ economies. Here, the value of the amenity is the quality of life and recreational uses forests may provide. However, Stoddart, who uses the Tobetic Wilderness Area in Nova Scotia as an example, warns that even when participatory decision-making models are used to make decisions over use of wilderness areas, certain groups may have more power over the outcomes than others.

Diversification: In addition to localization and innovation, researchers argue that economic diversity is essential to revitalizing rural places (Markey et al., 2008; Randall & Ironside, 1996). Diversification involves supporting the development of a wide range of local ventures, entrepreneurs, and emerging businesses through incentives, grants, business support, and training advice (Markey et al., 2008). The goal is to restore high-paying, high-skill, high-quality work opportunities that cater to different kinds of skills, interests, and talents. Building an enabling environment of this sort may in turn better speak to the passions of the people living in rural areas. Indeed, this research demonstrated that when youth believed their rural environments offered a variety of valued educational, occupational, recreational, social, emotional security, and identity resources to support their needs and aspirations, they were more likely to accentuate the compatibility or fit between themselves and their rural places, and less likely to want to leave.

The current research draws attention to the crucial need to shift the discourse from trying to ‘retain’ young people in rural areas, to focusing on how to create environments where youth

feel they have opportunities to thrive. It may be that with the localization and diversification of *quality* educational and occupational options, some Opportunity Strivers might decide to stay in their rural communities. However, the findings revealed that Opportunity Strivers were preparing to leave their rural places for more reasons than just the potential of better educational and career prospects. They wanted “just something different,” and easier access to the work, lifestyle, recreation, and social options they desired. Rather than blocking groups of young people who want to leave, we should support their aims for personal and occupational development. Simultaneously, we can invigorate the conditions in rural places. Stockdale (2006) agrees that the answer to youth out-migration is not to retain people, but to entice educated and highly-skilled people back to the area. She argues that economic regeneration requires in-migrants who will create new jobs and stimulate the demand for rural services. At the same time, individuals find it hard to return until endogenous development leads to conditions that support new migrants and local ventures. Though we know that currently approximately 25 percent of youth out-migrants return to their rural locations (Dupuy et al., 2000), there is potential to draw young leavers back to their rural places through the creation of resilience-nurturing environments. As youths’ interests, values, and aspirations shift over time, so too may their understandings of whether their rural places are compatible. Changes in their perception of compatibility may in turn affect their residential decisions.

In the final chapter, I reflect on the study’s findings and provide conclusions. I also consider the limitations of my study, and make suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the study, and provide suggestions for future research.

I detail in section 9.2 the value of using social constructionist grounded theory and a combination of visual, narrative, and observational methods to discern complex connections between diverse patterns of youth resilience, migration, and community change processes. I also note how this research addressed a gap in the resilience literature by recording and reporting on the experiences and perspectives of rural youth, whose voices are often left out of the discourse.

In section 9.3, I outline the limitations of the study and make suggestions for future research. I briefly discuss the implications of: the kinds of resilience processes accounted for in the research and the scope of the research population; the participant, researcher and community influences on the construction of conceptual categories; and the generalizability of the findings.

9.2 KEY STRENGTHS OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH

9.2.1 Methodological Strengths and the Implications for Developing Contextually-Relevant Resilience Theory, Policy and Intervention

Several important methodological strengths of the current study are worth elaborating upon, because they helped produce original theory that can be used to develop rural policy to support positive youth development and community interventions. These methodological strengths include the use of social constructionist grounded theory, the merging of visual, observational and narrative methods, and the numerous research sessions with each participant.

The use of social constructionist grounded theory proved useful for ascertaining the patterned use of various resilience processes by different kinds of youth in rural Shore Central Hants County. This work did not uncover *a* basic process, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest is the focus in grounded theory studies. Rather, the substantive theory crafted in this work is interdisciplinary in nature, and illuminates conceptual relationships between several complex processes related to youth development, resilience, migration, and community change. A social ecological (Ungar, 2013), or context-focussed approach alerted me to the possibility that when broader macro-structural changes alter aspects of youths' immediate social and physical environments, these changes can consequently affect the pathways available for youths' healthy development and adaptive functioning. A social constructionists' stance suggests that the ways in which these contextual transformations are felt and perceived may differ among youth, so that the effect of risk in one's environment varies as a function of the ways youth interpret their experiences and understand the meaning of resilience. The research approach therefore paid explicit attention to youths' diverse viewpoints and contextually embedded aspects of resilience.

In social constructionist grounded theory, the researcher evaluates her data throughout the entire research process, which provides the opportunity to follow pertinent leads (Charmaz, 2006). I began the project interested in documenting how rural youth conceptualize and strive toward resilience. The questions I posed to participants returned fruitful answers on this topic. What I did not plan for was the extent to which youths' constructions of, and transactions with and within, their rural places affected the processes they were enabled to engage to deal with economic decline in their rural areas. Systematic checks, constant comparison of data to data, repeated research sessions with youth, and theoretical sampling were valuable ways of examining and clarifying the range of experiences and emotions youth associate with their rural places. Through participants' stories and images, the significance of various places in youths' lives emerged. I was able to see how specific spaces, people, and structures that youth associate with rural and urban places hold emotional, physical, financial, and relational importance for different groups of youth.

The procedure described above led to conceptualizing resilience as transactional youth-place processes that enabled youth to positively address the risks associated with rural restructuring and move toward a relationship characterized by youth - place compatibility. Youth-place compatibility, a multi-dimensional concept, refers to youths' characterizations of their rural places as compatible (or incompatible) with their needs, wants, aspirations, and subjectivities. Youth pointed to the ways their rural environments and relationships within these places supported or limited their ability to take specific actions to acquire and sustain valued educational, occupational, recreational, social, emotional security, and identity resources. Youths' depictions of their rural places differed across clusters of youth - and changed over time and space for individuals - depending upon their experiences in and out of their rural places; their

weighted values and responsibilities; conditions and timing; and their constructions of themselves, their rural places and whether they perceived these as a fit. Agency and structure, intricately-bound to one another, played out differently in the lives of various participants, and influenced how opportunities and constraints were understood, experienced, and dealt with by the youths in rural Hants County. Some youth were better situated to access the resources and supports that enabled them to navigate the risks of rural restructuring, while others stumbled to find their way. Even though several youth portrayed their rural places as lacking the resources to support their aspirations, only those who believed they could build the necessary social, psychological, and financial resources to leave considered out-migration a viable possibility. Indeed, key to the findings were that resilience does not just depend upon youths' agency to make adaptations in terse environments, nor is it solely about having structural and social resources available to them. Rather, resilience depends upon the transactions between young people and their ecologies that enable youth to draw upon and meaningfully use resilience-promoting resources to address their risks and meet their needs, wants, and aspirations. As Ungar (2011) explains:

Shifting the focus from the child to the child's social and physical ecology positions the discourse of resilience as one of process and resource provision. The compounding effects of risk are more easily explained as they compromise the capacity of environments to provide what individuals need. When navigation is thwarted, or the resources that are provided lack meaning, then it is more likely that the environment will fail in its facilitative role (p. 11).

Thus, in order to nurture youth resilience, we need to optimize the positive exchanges that occur between young people and their environments. With this objective in mind, the

following suggestions were provided as methods to nourish positive relationships between young people and their rural places in Hants County: investing in rural resources, services, and infrastructure; creating equitable systems and access to opportunities; fostering economic and occupational regeneration by providing incentives for localization, diversification and innovation; offering place-based education, training and capacity building; and focusing on collaborative, multi-stake holder processes for developing contextually-sensitive, place-based policies that recognize the integrated nature of the social, political, economic, environmental, and spatial ecologies in which youth interact.

9.2.2 Valuing the Experiences and Perspectives of Rural Youth

One key gap in resilience literature is the limited inclusion of young, rural perspectives (Crockett, Shanahan, & Jackson-Newsom, 2000). The current research helps to address this oversight. Extra time was spent to ensure an accurate portrayal of the viewpoints and experiences youth shared with me. Honorably depicting the co-constructions developed between myself and the participants was critical to me, because so often the voices of rural youth go unnoticed or ignored in resilience empiricism.

Listening to youths' unique standpoints, and considering participants the experts in their own lives was integral to unveiling unknown qualities about rural resilience and other social processes. As an example, youths' discussions of feeling included and excluded, and of feeling in or out of place, prompted recognition of the need to break down the structural barriers and power hierarchies that block certain youth from reaching essential resilience-promoting resources and processes.

Youth had the opportunity to present themselves as they saw fit, and they represented themselves as strong, resourceful, and capable individuals, albeit in different ways. When we give recognition to the myriad ways youth see themselves and their relationships with and within their rural places, it consequently gives rise to constructions that refute the dominant portrayal of youth who stay behind in rural areas as backward, broken, or with limited aspirations to ‘go further.’ Certainly, some feel trapped, critical, and embittered (Jones, 2000; Looker & Naylor, 2009); but the youth in this study, whether intending to stay *or* leave, demonstrated incredible fortitude to persevere and reach their visions of success, despite being disenfranchised by development practices and policies that disregard rural people and places. Just as the stayers did not see themselves as having limited aspirations, the youth intending to leave did not portray themselves as detached migrants who were disconnected from the notion of place.

9.3 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Some features of the current study are important to mention and point to areas for future research. In this section I discuss the implications extending from the kinds of resilience processes accounted for in the research, given the boundaries placed on the research population criteria, the influences on the construction of conceptual categories, and the generalizability of the findings.

9.3.1 The Research Population and the Kinds of Resilience Processes Documented

Firstly, the research took place in one area (Shore Central) of rural Hants County at a certain period in time. Even within this setting, differences in youths' wellbeing constructions, place relationships, migration intentions, and use of resilience processes were noted. It is presumed then, that regional, cultural, and community differences in diverse locales affect the kinds of challenges confronting youth, as well as the assets and strengths they have to draw upon to address particular developmental threats. These geographic, cultural, and contextual differences, in turn, have important implications for youth development. As Ungar (2013) explains, "The variability of individuals in their responses and over time and context makes it unlikely the same process is operating consistently, or the same outcomes will hold across time and place" (p. 263). Research in alternate rural locations may uncover hidden adaptive processes unaccounted for in the current study. Longitudinal research with the same population in Shore Central Hants County would help determine what youths' use of resilience processes looks like over time.

In the current research, I documented the conceptual relationships between youths' place relationships, migration *intentions*, and use of particular resilience processes. These residential

and mobility orientations may or may not relate to whether youth *actually* stay in their rural communities or leave. I recorded the reasons young people still living in Shore Central wanted to leave, but did not invite participation from youth originally from Hants County who moved elsewhere; therefore, I am unable to report on the potentially myriad additional factors that contribute to youths' migration decisions.

The research also does not account for how youth who moved away from their rural communities feel about the places where they grew up. In their research collaboration studying rural youths' place-attachments and migration views, Jones and Jamieson (Jones, 1999; Jamieson, 2000) found, for example, that some young leavers expressed nostalgia about where they grew up and longed to return to their rural areas. Conversely, they found that some stayers felt conflicted, disaffected, and critical of their rural places and their relationships there. Thus, numerous possibilities present themselves for future research on youths' emotional, financial, physical, and social relationships with and within their rural places and how these may affect their decisions of where to live.

9.3.2 Influences on the Construction of Conceptual Categories

There were participant, researcher, and community influences on the construction of conceptual categories. The substantive grounded theory was constructed from listening to the experiences and viewpoints of the participants, and then conceptualizing their concerns to generate named patterns (Glaser, 2001). Their descriptions were abstracted and compared to develop the categories of interest. The substantive theory is, therefore, my interpretation of the participants' worlds and not an exact replica of it (Charmaz, 2006).

The selection of participants occurred through a process of referral. Youth were nominated to the study who, according to community contacts, were doing well despite the challenges and changes associated with living in an economically-depressed, restructuring rural area. So, local notions of what it means to ‘do well’ despite the challenges faced in rural Hants County undoubtedly filtered participation, which in turn influenced the kinds of information I gathered and the substantive theory constructed. Only one participant, the Systemically Strapped youth, was suggested to the project because he was “on the path to resilience.” His experiences most vividly brought to light the ways youths’ opportunities and attempts toward personal betterment are intertwined with positions of power (or disregard), community networks, broader systemic forces, and personal barriers. The research process involved collecting multiple sources of data with him over a minimum of three sessions, which provided me the opportunity to check my interpretations of the category and aim for conceptual depth. However, since the category called Systemically Strapped is based on only one youth’s experience, it remains unclear if this place-relationship identification is exhaustive. Working with other youth facing the same kind of challenges as the Systemically Strapped youth may reveal more complex sub-categories and thus deserves further inquiry. Social constructionist grounded theory is well suited to accommodate future investigation into the category of Systemically Strapped, since it is “systematically grounded and designed to accommodate modifiability,” and thus allows for the inclusion of “new dimensions revealed through further comparisons” (Guthrie, 2000, as cited in Glaser, 2001, p. 66).

9.3.3 Generalizability of the Findings

It is unknown whether the substantive theory developed in this research is generalizable outside the research population. Future research could investigate the utility of the theoretical

framework in diverse contexts and situations or with different kinds of populations. For example, the framework could be examined for relevance with youth facing other types of major transitions, such as socio-political collapse or forced migration. The experiences and perspectives of youth who grew up in rural areas but moved to other locations could be explored. Alternatively, one could investigate the place-relationships of urban individuals who migrated to rural areas, and how their transactions in rural places affect the kinds of adjustment processes they use to improve or maintain self-place compatibility. The usefulness of the model could be determined with youth facing developmental threats in urban places, in geographically diverse rural or suburban locales, or in different cultural contexts. The exploration could also extend to other kinds of youth-environment relationships, such as in the workplace. As the substantive theory is compared or expanded upon in other substantive areas or contexts, there is the potential to build a formal theory.

9.4 CONCLUSION

Conceptualizing resilience as the relationship between youths, their risks, and the qualities of their environments advances the concept of resilience as more than just person-focussed attributes or youths' ability to bounce back. We come to understand the constructive, transactional nature of youth development. Youth are active in their own lives, not just passively tolerating or absorbing the impact of broader sociological forces. Yet the findings from the current research also show that youths' emotional, relational, and behavioural processes are inseparable from the historical and power processes that form the contexts within which youth make major life-course and residential decisions. Youths' scope for agency is shaped in part by the very systems they influence through their decisions and actions. Thus, the broader risks and daily tribulations of living in rural areas, as well as the often immeasurable benefits and varying attachments to their rural places, make leaving or staying more complex than just a matter of choice, even though in the current study youth often portrayed it as such.

I found that many of the young research participants were eager to share their experiences with me and stated clearly how they believed their communities—and their life chances—could be supported. It is only by making previously unaccounted for experiences and perspectives visible that academics, policy makers, and community planners will take care to provide contextually-relevant policies and interventions for rural youth. When young people have a say in the issues that impact them, they may recognize their potential for sparking positive change in their own lives, as well as those of their families and community members (Boyden & Mann, 2005). In her keynote address about rebuilding threatened rural and remote fisheries and communities, Barbara Neis (2015) asked: Who are we rebuilding these rural policies and communities for? Who will carry the burdens of these interventions and who will reap the

benefits? Answering these questions will have significant implications for the generation of rural policy and community development. As the current research findings make clear, instead of trying to ‘retain’ youth in rural communities, our focus needs to be on building resilience-enabling environments where youth are offered the opportunities and supports to lead thriving lives, wherever their aspirations may take them.

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APPENDIX A Letter of Information



Faculty of Health Professions

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study **Letter of Information**

You are invited to participate in a study looking at how young people living in rural areas cope with many different kinds of challenges growing up. To participate, you must have graduated from Hants North Rural High School, live in Hants County Nova Scotia, be 18 - 23 years old, and be coping well with the difficulties you face. The study is part of doctoral research being led by Nora Didkowsky, Dalhousie University. The study will involve six parts. All participants will be asked to take part in Parts 1, 2, and 3. Only some participants will be invited to take part in Parts 4, 5 and 6.

What you will be asked to do:

Part 1: A researcher will visit you to tell you about the study orally, as well as provide you this 'Letter of Information.' The researcher will leave the 'Letter of Information' with you so you have time to decide whether you would like to participate in the study. If you would like to participate please contact Nora Didkowsky, using the contact information below.

Part 2: If you decide to take part in the study, Nora Didkowsky will visit you at a later date, and ask you to sign an Informed Consent form, to show that you understand what you will be asked to do during the study, as well as the risks and benefits. Afterward, you will be asked in a private interview to talk about your life. Your interview will be audio-taped. You will be asked for your opinions on growing up, and about your community, your friends, your family, and other relationships that are important to you. In your interview, you will be asked to remember stressful times in your life, which may make you feel uncomfortable. A contact number will be provided after the study if you would like someone to talk to about your thoughts and feelings. At this time, you will be asked to draw and brainstorm on paper the relationships, resources and

supports available for you or not available to you in your community. The interview will take approximately 1 hour. At this time, you will be given a disposable camera and asked to take pictures over the next week. You will be asked to take pictures of your life, the places and things that are important to you, and anything else you would like discuss about your life. Nora will get the camera back to develop the pictures when you have finished taking them.

Part 3: Once your pictures have been developed, we can set up a meeting time so that you can be shown the developed pictures you took and asked about each image. This will take approximately 1 hour.

Part 4: Only some participants will be invited to take part in the video portion of the study (Part 4, 5 and 6). Participants will be chosen based on the answers they gave in the interview so that we can learn from people with a wide variety of different views. If you are invited to take part, and agree to participate in the video portion of the study, the researcher (Nora) and an assistant will visit you in your home and community and using a video camera, tape you as you go about your life as you normally would for one day (about 6 to 8 hours). The videotaping will stop while you are sleeping, or whenever you would like. You can direct the camera to film anything you like, and tell the researchers to turn the camera off at any time you don't want to be filmed. The researchers will not film any activities where you are putting yourself in danger or breaking the law. Other people who you meet that day will be asked if they mind being filmed. If they don't want to be filmed, the camera will be turned off or pointed away from them.

Part 5: On a different day following the video filming, the researcher would meet with you to discuss the experience of being filmed, and to ask which parts of your filmed day are meaningful to you. Your opinions will be audio-taped so that they can be reviewed at a later point. This discussion will take approximately 30 minutes.

Part 6: At another time, the researcher will return to show you short video clips from the video of the 'day' in your life. They will ask your opinions of what happened that day and what you think about the clips. Your reflections will be audio-taped, so that they can be reviewed at a later point. The reflection session will take approximately 1 hour.

Possible risks and benefits: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, or want to withdraw from the study at any time, your wishes will be respected without penalty. If you decline to participate, it will not affect any services that you may be receiving. Because you will be videotaped as part of the study, it will be difficult to ensure complete confidentiality. However, the anonymity and confidentiality of your

participation is of utmost importance. Only the researcher and the research assistant will know your identity. Only a made-up name that you choose for yourself will ever be used, and specific details of where you live will never be shared. You can ask to review your interview statements and video footage, at any point. If you become concerned with anything you said, you can contact Nora Didkowsky using the contact information below. You may ask any questions you have before, during, and after the study.

All participants will receive a small honorarium or gift equal to the amount of \$50 for taking part in Parts 1, 2, and 3 of the study. Participants who also take part in Parts 4, 5, and 6 will receive an additional \$50, for a total of \$100. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you will still receive part of the honorarium, based on which parts of the study you have taken part in. The amounts are as follows: Part 2, \$15; Part 3, \$35; Part 4, \$35; and Parts 5 and 6, \$15.

The only time we will have to inform someone of your participation in the study and provide them with your full name is if we suspect you are at risk of abuse, or that your actions may threaten the safety of someone else. Reports of alleged abuse will be made directly to the child welfare agency in the area where you live. In such cases, we would let you and your caregivers/parents know we are doing this.

The interview tapes, transcripts, images and video recordings will be used to understand how young people from rural areas cope with many different kinds of challenges growing up. The research data will be kept in a secure, locked location. After 10 years, all of the original data will be destroyed (data that doesn't identify you, like transcripts, will still be available for review). The research will be published in books and journals, and parts of the videotapes and images you take could be shared at presentations and conferences (such as at Dalhousie University, other locations in Nova Scotia, and around the world) so others can learn about what helps young people cope. If you agree to have your face shown on the videos, you must sign a video release form; otherwise the tapes will be edited so that your face and the faces of others will be blurred to conceal identities. We will never use your real name or share any specific details that might identify you; however, it may be possible that someone could recognize you in your photographs or videos. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the research report when the study is complete, you can contact Nora at the address below.

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

CONTACT INFORMATION

Nora Didkowsky

Email: ndidkowsky@gmail.com; Phone: (902) 489-2524

Address: RR#1 Kennetcook, Hants County, Nova Scotia, B0N 1P0

If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors , Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, ethics@dal.ca

Thank you!

APPENDIX B Voluntary Informed Consent Form



Faculty of Health Professions

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

Voluntary Informed Consent Form

You have indicated that you would like to participate in a study looking at how young people from rural areas cope with many different kinds of challenges growing up. Please read this form and the Information Letter carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study. The Information Letter tells you what you will be asked to do as a participant in the study, any possible risks and benefits to taking part, and who to contact if you have any questions or concerns. By signing this form, you agree that the information below, as well as the Information Letter, has been explained fully to you. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you have been explained that:

- Your participation is completely voluntary and that you can stop the study at any time. If you are uncomfortable answering any question, you may choose not to answer.
- If you participate in Study Parts 1, 2, and 3, you will receive a small honorarium or gift equal to the amount of \$50. If you are invited and agree to take part in Study Parts 4, 5 and 6, you will receive an additional \$50, for a total of \$100. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you will still receive part of an honorarium, based on which parts of the study you took part in. The amounts are as follows: Part 2, \$15; Part 3, \$35; Part 4, \$35; and Parts 5 and 6, \$15.
- Study Parts 1, 2 and 3 will take approximately 2 hours, plus the time it takes for you to take your photographs. Study Parts 4, 5 and 6 will take approximately 7 to 9 hours.
- Only the researcher, research assistant and the researcher's supervisor (the research team) will know your identity. Your full name will never be used, nor will specific details of where you live be shared with anyone except the research team. Your participation in the study is anonymous. Anything you share with the researchers will never be shown or discussed with your parents/guardians or the community organization that recommended you to the project.

- Reports of alleged or suspected abuse of the youth participants, or that the youth may harm someone else, will be made directly to the child welfare agency in the area where the child lives in Canada.
- The decision to participate in the study is yours. If you do not wish to participate, or want to withdraw from the study at any time, your wishes will be respected without penalty. If you decline to participate, it will not affect any services that you may be receiving.

If you are invited and agree to participate in Study Parts 4, 5, and 6:

- You can ask for a break in the videotaping, or stop the videotaping completely.
- Only the researcher, research assistant and researcher's supervisor (the research team) will know your identity. The video tapes will be shown at presentations and at conferences. If you agree to have your face shown on videos shown outside the research team, you must sign a video release form; otherwise the tapes will be edited so that your face and the faces of others will be blurred to conceal identities. Anything you share with the researchers will never be shown or discussed with your family or the community organization that recommended you to the project.

For all participants:

- What you say may be quoted in publications, presentations (in Nova Scotia and around the world) and the final report, but we will never use your real name or share any specific details that might identify you. You can ask to review your audio-taped interview statements and/or video footage, at any point, up to six months from now. If you become concerned with anything you have said, you can ask for parts, or all, of your interview audio-tapes and/or videotape not to be quoted. You can ask for all or any part of the interview audiotapes and/or videotape to be destroyed, at any point, up to six months from now. To do so, please contact the researcher, Nora Didkowsky at *Phone: (902)-489-2524, Email: ndidkowsky@gmail.com*
- The interview audiotapes, transcripts, and video recordings will be used by the researchers to understand how youth cope in many different parts of the world. The research data and recordings will be kept for ten years in a secure, locked location. After 10 years, all of the original data will be destroyed (data that doesn't identify you, like transcripts, will still be available for review).
- We will never use your real name or share any specific details that might identify you. The tapes/ photographs will be edited so that your face and the faces of others will be

blurred to conceal identities. If you agree to have your face shown on the photographs/ videos, you must sign a photo/video release form.

If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors , Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, ethics@dal.ca

Thank you!

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

Youth Informed Consent

SIGNATURE PAGE

The Voluntary Informed Consent Form and the Information Letter have been explained fully to me, and I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interviews, and that things that I say may be quoted anonymously in publications and presentations. I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. I consent to taking part in this study.

(Research Participant's Signature)

(Date)

If selected, would you be interested in being contacted to participate in the Study Parts 4, 5, and 6?

Yes

No

The study has been explained to the participant and this form was signed voluntarily

(Researcher's Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX C Participant Photo and Video Release Form



Faculty of Health Professions

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

Participant Photo and Video Release Form

*To be signed by participants if they request to have their face visible on video and/or photograph data shown at presentations, conferences or as part of publications and reports.

I, _____ (participant's name) agree that my face may be shown on video footage taken of me, or of photographs I have taken of myself, while participating in doctoral research about how young people living in rural areas cope with different challenges while growing up. I understand that parts of the videotapes and/or photographs will be shared with people at presentations and conferences in Nova Scotia (like Dalhousie University) and around the world so they can learn about what helps young people cope. I understand that the researcher will never use my real name or share any specific details that might identify me, but that it may be possible that someone could recognize me in my photographs or videos. I understand that if I prefer, the researcher will edit the video tapes and/or photographs so that my face will be blurred to conceal my identity. Therefore, not having my face blurred on the videos is voluntary, and I may change my mind and request my face be blurred on video tapes and/or photographs shown at any point, up to six months from now. My signature below indicates that I agree to have my face visible on video and/or photographs taken as part of the research study.

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

The *Participant Photo and Video Release Form* has been explained to the participant and this form was signed voluntarily

(Researcher's Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX D Semi-structured Interview Guide

Nora Didkowsky

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

Interview Questions

Place:

Time:

About the participant:

years living in this community:

Participant's home village/where they grew up:

Participant's Age:

Livelihood/employment:

Education level:

Education level of parents:

Are they married?:

family members:

children and their ages:

Please note that the core questions are numbered below, and prompting questions are bulleted underneath each core question, to be used if necessary.

Participants may choose not to answer any question at any time, or may choose to go back to a specific question later.

1) Please tell me about what a typical week-day is like in your life? How do you spend your day? What is a typical weekend-day like?

2) Tell me more about the path you took after you finished high school

- What have you done, where have you gone, etc

3) Why did you remain in (return to) _____ (community name)?

4) What has your experience been like, living in a community like _____ (insert community name)?

- What things are challenging here?

- What do you value about growing up here?
- 5) Is there a difference between the challenges your parents or elder generations faced and the challenges that youth face now?
- Do you feel your parents had certain expectations of what you would (or should) do following graduation from high school?
 - Did you have expectations about what you would (or should) do following graduating high school?
 - Are the expectations placed on young people changing?
- 6) Have you ever considered moving away? Why or why not?
- Do you have close family members/ acquaintances/ friends who have moved away?
 - Have you travelled outside of _____(community name)? Where did you travel, and what did you think of those experiences?
 - If there were work or training opportunities here, would you choose to stay?
- 7) What does “wellbeing” mean to you?” (other words: to live well, to be well, etc)
- What do young people in your community need in order to grow up well here?
 - What do you need in your life to be happy and feel successful?
- 8) Please tell me about the relationships that are important to you.
- What does this relationship (ie with parents, friends etc, depending on response from youth) mean to you? What do you get from this relationship?
 - Can you describe your friends to me? What do they like to do? Why do you like them?
 - Do you have someone you consider a role model? Can you describe them?
 - Do you think that you are seen as a role model by other people?
- 9) What kinds of things are most challenging for you living here?
- Is this the same for other young people you know?
- 10) What do you do when you face difficulties in your life?

- Do you have some examples?
- What are your strengths? Your skills?
- Please tell me about a challenge you had and how you overcame this challenge.

11) What things (supports, resources, programs, facilities) are available in your community?"

- Are there opportunities for you or people your age in your community to work?
- Do you have access to education, health and other services?
- What programs are available for you to take part in?
- Do you feel safe and secure here? How do others protect you?
- Are there places you go for recreation (fun)?

12) What resources or programs do you think would be helpful for young people in your community?"

- If you could change something about your community what would it be?
- Who do you think could help with such a project/ idea?
- What are the strengths you see in your community? The problems? The opportunities?

13) Do you and/or other people you know contribute to your community?

- Do you ever volunteer?
- Are you involved in any community-change projects? (If yes, please tell me more about them)
- How would you change your immediate environment to better your life?

14) What are your personal goals for the future?

- Do you feel like you will be able to do those things? Why?
- What challenges do you expect to face in the future?

15) Is there anything you would like to add to this interview?

APPENDIX E Life-space Mapping Script

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

Life-space Mapping Script

The participant will be provided materials for drawing, such as paper, colored markers, pencils, and crayons. *Prior to beginning the life-space mapping, it will be explained to the participant:*

I am going to ask you questions about your life and your experiences living in a rural community. When I ask you the questions, write down, draw, use symbols, or illustrate in any way that you like, the responses that come to your mind. Your life-space map doesn't need to look a particular way. For example, you could use different colored or shaped markers to show factors or relationships that are at different levels of importance to you. When you begin, you may immediately see connections between different items, people, places or experiences. Use the materials in front of you to show these associations. There may be some answers or ideas that at first seem unconnected or unimportant. Record these anyway – they may be connected with other ideas later.

Prompts:

1. This piece of paper in front of you represents your personal world. Place (or draw) yourself on the paper somewhere.”
2. Who are the significant people in your life?
3. What significant events, experiences and/or activities have helped make you who you are?
4. What community resources, supports, amenities etc do you use?
5. In what ways does the government (or community policies/ rules) help support your wellbeing?
6. What resources, supports or opportunities are lacking in your community, that you feel would help you?
7. What are the benefits of living in a rural area?
8. What are the challenges of living in a rural area?

9. Use the drawing materials to highlight areas of connection and/or tension between different ideas, responses, items. Are there pulls in different directions , or conflicting needs and demands? What pressures are there? What causes that tension?

APPENDIX F Photo-elicitation and Video-elicitation Scripts

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

Photo-elicitation Script

* Script developed for Liebenberg's PhD research, and revised for the Negotiating Resilience Project

1. Pick the photograph you like the most and the one you like the least. Tell me about these photographs
2. Pick the photograph that shows what is good about your life. Now pick the photograph that shows what is really difficult in your life. Why did you pick these images? Tell me about them.
3. Which photographs show what you really enjoy about living in this community and what you really dislike about living here? Explain them.
4. Is there any other photograph here that you would still like to talk about?
5. Is there any other photograph here that you would not like to talk about? Do you want to say why you don't want to talk about this picture, or would you rather just move on?
6. Is there something you did not take a photo of that you wish you could have photographed?

Video-elicitation Script

* Revised from the script developed for the Negotiating Resilience Project

The script for viewing and discussing the clips on the "*day in the life*" compilation DVD, below, is to be used to facilitate reflection by participants of what occurred during their filmed *day*.

Prior to viewing the clips, it will be explained to participants:

- 1) "I am going to show you some clips of your day. I have selected some examples of interesting interactions and of some of the ways you seem to be doing well. Please explain a little more about what is happening in each clip."

After each clip:

- 1) "Can you tell me a bit more about what was happening in this clip?"

At the end:

- 1) "Did you like the clips I chose?" "Why or why not?"
- 2) "Was there a particular clip that you thought showed your personal strengths especially well?"
- 3) "Are there events that were filmed that should have been chosen for the compilation DVD other than the ones I just showed you?"
- 4) "Was there one clip that especially showed what you enjoy about living in this community or what you really dislike about living here? Please explain."

APPENDIX H Photo Release Form for Individuals Photographed by Youth Participants



Faculty of Health Professions

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

Photo Release Form for Individuals Photographed by Youth Participants

*If participants take photographs of individuals as part of the photo-elicitation portion of the research, the researcher may use these photographs in publications and/or presentations IF the faces are blurred, rendering the photographed individual (s) unidentifiable. However, IF the researcher wishes to use these photographs in any publication or presentation without blurring the photographed individual's/ individuals' face(s), then the researcher must directly obtain consent from that person/ persons.

I was informed that _____ (participant's name) is taking part in a research project looking at how young people growing up in rural areas cope with different kinds of challenges. I understand that _____ (participant's name) was given a camera to take pictures of people, places, and things that are important to him/her.

_____ (participant's name) took my photograph and told the researcher why s/he selected me with my permission. I understand that I am not the focus of the research. I agree that my face may be shown on photographs that _____ (participant's name) took of me. I understand that the photographs will be shared with people at presentations and conferences in Nova Scotia (like Dalhousie University) and around the world so they can learn about what helps young people cope. I understand that the researcher will never use my real name or share any specific details that might identify me, but that it may be possible that someone could recognize me in the photographs. I understand that if I prefer, the researcher will edit the photographs so that my face will be blurred to conceal my identity. Therefore, not having my face blurred on the photographs is voluntary, and I may change my mind and request my face be blurred on photographs shown at any point, up to six months from now. My signature below indicates that I agree to have my face visible on the photographs taken as part of the research study.

My name (please print): _____

My relationship to the research participant: _____

My Signature: _____ Date: _____

The *Photo Release Form for Individuals Photographed by Youth Participants* has been explained to the individual and this form was signed voluntarily

(Researcher's Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX I Day in the Life Bystander Process

Youth Resilience in Rural Atlantic Canada Study

Process for if someone walks into the view of the video camera during the ‘Day in the Life’ filming

- 1) Shut off the camera. Introduce yourself with the assistance of the local research assistant and explain orally to the person that the youth is taking part in a study looking at how young people from around the world cope with many different kinds of challenges.
- 2) Explain to the person, “Although the focus of the film is only on *participant, I understand there will be points during the day when others are part of *participant’s life. Are you comfortable being filmed, or would you prefer not to be part of the film?” They should know that even if they appear on the film, the youth participant is the only focus of the research.
- 3) If they agree to being videotaped, it should be explained to them that if clips of the videos are shown at conferences or in educational settings, the identities of all people recorded in the film will remain anonymous. Allow them once again the opportunity to agree or decline to be filmed.