

RURALITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION:
IMPLICATIONS FOR IDENTITY AND PERSISTENCE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Tammy Lou Maltzan, M.S., B.S.

The Ohio State University

2006

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Leonard Baird, Advisor

Professor Peter Demerath, Advisor

Professor Susan Jones

Professor Helen Marks

Approved by

Advisors
College of Education

ABSTRACT

In rural areas, where per capita income frequently lags behind state and national averages and the percentages of those living below poverty levels continue to rise, rural economies are often hard put to support the education of rural youth. Matters of economy, first-generation student status, familial support, and race have been identified as barriers to the enrollment and persistence of rural students in college. Previous research has indicated that rural students are less likely than their urban and suburban counterparts to enroll in postsecondary institutions with intentions of obtaining a baccalaureate degree. For those who do enroll, few are likely to persist to achieve their degree.

This dissertation seeks to illuminate the cultural processes that shape the identities and postsecondary pathways of college students from rural areas. The ethnographic account herein describes the cultural structures and practices of identification that served to constitute rural subjectivities in one rural town and further details the experiences of college-bound graduates from that town. This research suggests rurality as an often overlooked demographic by which students might be identified at national, state, and regional levels for purposes of access and retention in higher education.

DEDICATION

To my family, with love

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At the beginning of this project I could not have understood the depth of gratitude I would feel upon its completion. The writing of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, and assistance of so many. Here I offer my deepest appreciation.

First, to the community of Danville, Ohio, you became my inspiration in writing this dissertation. Thank you for opening yourselves up to me in a way that would facilitate this project and, hopefully, allow others to understand what being from a place like Danville is all about. “You go back - - - it’s so weird but you just do.” I understand now, better than I did before. In coming to know you, I have come to know myself. Thank you.

I am also grateful to Mr. Bawn, Superintendent of Schools, for giving me directions to Danville the first time I called and for welcoming me back to the school for the 2004-2005 school year. It was a year I will never forget. My thanks to the Danville Local School Board of Education – Richard Gardner, Carolyn Addair, Bill Miller, Joy Parr-Varner, and Sheryl Mickley – for allowing me to feel such a part of the Danville school community (I still have the foam apple you gave me on teacher appreciation day and I will treasure it always). I am also indebted to Mr. Kotasek, Mrs. Wilford, and Roxi for providing me the wealth of information I would need to get started in school.

Invaluable. And to Susan Payne (the busiest woman I know!), thank you.

To the teachers, thank you for letting me eat lunch with you and for your willingness to share your thoughts with me throughout the year. In particular, I want to thank Mr. Ackert for all of our conversations, both on and off the record; Miss Stevens for allowing me to participate in AP English and for recognizing that “these kids have dreams”; and Miss Wagner for welcoming me to 2nd and 5th periods (I learned a lot – about Math *and* Danville!).

Most importantly, and above all, I am grateful to the Class of 2005 for welcoming me into your classrooms and into your lives. You are a funny, fascinating, informative group of people who have my deepest respect. I want to thank Miss Wagner’s fifth period students in particular. I am not allowed to name you, here, but you know who you are. I miss you guys.

College student development has been my passion since I entered the field of student affairs as a resident advisor in 1985. I am forever indebted to the first-year college students whose stories became central to the findings of this research. To Katherine, Ethan, Devin, Lori, and Leigh, though these are your pseudonyms, I hope you recognize yourselves here. Thank you for your time (lots of time!), for your thoughtful renderings of life in Danville and life in college, and for your willingness to meet with this “outsider,” this lady from Columbus, who wanted to interview you. Your stories will help other rural students who make the transition from places like Danville to higher education.

This research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Association for the Study of Higher Education in its alliance with the Lumina Foundation

for Education. Thank you for believing in this project. Special thanks to Wei-ni Wang, who deserves a medal for her orchestration of the ASHE/Lumina Fellows events at our annual meetings. I am also grateful for the funding assistance of The Ohio State University College of Education and School of Educational Policy and Leadership. I am especially appreciative of the Student Personnel Assistantship program, the oldest such program in the country, not only for its support in financing my education but for the invaluable experience it provides for student affairs professionals (and professionals to be) across the country.

This leads to my expression of appreciation to Rich Hollingsworth for helping me learn and grow under his supervision in the Office of Student Affairs. Thank you, Rich, for your insight, for your perspective, and for always supporting me in my research. Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in one town while being employed in another posed its challenges. Thank you for your patience as I found my way through them.

There are those without whom my PhD might have become just another degree. It is not. It represents for me a six year process of learning and growth that I never could have known in advance. A professor said during one of our orientation meetings, “This process will change you.” It has, and I am grateful to the people who have so carefully and intentionally challenged and supported me throughout.

Dr. Baird, who has been with me as my advisor from beginning to end, thank you for our meandering theoretical conversations that served to inform my work. Thank you for the laughter we shared at times when I was in need of laughter. If I heard it once, I heard it a hundred times, “The best dissertation is a done dissertation.” Here it is. I hope you like it.

Dr. Demerath, thank you for agreeing to serve on my dissertation committee after initially saying that you would not. This project would not have taken the shape it has without your guidance, and I am grateful to you for that. I am not sure I have the words to express my gratitude for your support as my co-advisor during the last year of this project. Because of you, I understand what people mean when they use the phrase “deep learning,” for you have made this such a process for me. I hope you are pleased with the result.

Dr. Jones, I feel honored to have worked with and learned from you, one of the best in our field. I still have my first paper from your class, *EdP&L: 887 Diversity in Higher Education: Theories of College Student Development*, on which you wrote, “You need to learn to use APA.” Boy, did I ever! I hope you will see the learning that took place in that class reflected in the pages of this document, not just in my use of APA (☺), but also the learning that comes in considering processes of student development from diverse perspectives. You have been instrumental in helping me do so.

Dr. Marks, thank you for allowing me to consider broad issues, such as “race” and “poverty,” from a rural perspective. This project took shape in your class, where I recognized that there was a whole group of students for whom issues of access and equity in higher education were a concern, but who were reflected in these broader discussions - - and they were students who looked like me. Thank you for encouraging me to bring “place” to the educational policy mix.

My Family. We have suffered some losses along the way of these past six years. With these acknowledgements, I want to remember them:

Gram (1918-2004) – I hope you found Grampa up there somewhere and that you

are enjoying your afternoons, holding hands across the picnic tables they must surely keep in heaven for people from the country. Where else would we sit?

Aunt Marian (1920-2004) – Just two days after Gramma. We miss you down here.

Betty (1934-2004) – I am doing my best to look after Laurie Ann. Don't you worry about her.

Jill (1964-2005) – My closest cousin. I pray that you are resting well.

My sisters, Cindy and Penny. Since I started "PhD School," our Sisters' Weekends have held some of my most treasured moments. I am sustained in our relationship(s). ...and thanks for the great idea about studying rural student transitions to college, Cind. I think you'll be pleased with the results.

I am ever grateful for the support of my parents, Mom, Dad and Linda. All in all, you done good. Thank you for raising me up the way you did. Who would have thought, when I left for college from little Earlville, NY that it would come to this? I didn't even know what a PhD was. Thank you for believing in me, and believing in me, and believing in me. You are a small group of the finest people I know.

Finally and always, to my Laurie Ann...more than words can say.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
VITA	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Topic and Purpose	5
Significance of this Research	5
Qualitative Frameworks and Research Questions	7
Limitations	9
CHAPTER 2	12
RURAL STUDENTS IN REVIEW: RELEVANT RESEARCH	12
To Be a Rural Student	13
Rural Students in College	18
<i>College Students from Small (Rural) Schools</i>	18
<i>College Students from Rural Areas</i>	21
<i>The Relationship between Growing up Rural and Postsecondary Persistence</i>	23
Barriers and Supports to College Enrollment and Persistence	29
<i>Parental and Family Expectations</i>	29
<i>First-Generation College Student Status</i>	30
<i>The Impact of Race</i>	31
<i>Financial Constraints</i>	32
<i>Finding a Place to Be”</i>	33\
A Study in Rural Culture	35

Summary	36
CHAPTER 3	39
STUDYING RURALITY: KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS	39
The Bifurcation of the College Student:	41
Student Development Theory	42
<i>Psychosocial Perspectives on College Student Development</i>	44
<i>Establishing Identity in Context</i>	45
<i>Cognitive Perspectives on College Student Development</i>	46
<i>Self-Authorship: A More Integrated Approach</i>	49
<i>Self-Authorship in Context</i>	50
Bringing Culture to the Developmental Mix	51
Locating Culture	53
Identifying “The Rural”	54\
<i>The Empiricist / Rationalist Rural: Rural as a Landscape</i>	54
<i>The Cultural Rural: Rural as Community</i>	56
<i>Gesellschaft Gone Global</i>	59
<i>The Many Rurals of the Postmodern: Rural as Identity</i>	61
<i>The contested countryside</i>	61
Thinking Globally, Researching Locally	64
In the Current Era of Globalization and Postmodern Theory:.....	65
Summary	67
CHAPTER 4	69
STRUCTURES AND MEANING:DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	69
Research Questions.....	69
Epistemology	70
Methodology.....	71
Overall Approach and Rationale.....	71
Design	73
<i>Setting and Population</i>	73
<i>Sampling Strategies</i>	74
<i>Sample: Research Participants</i>	76
<i>Data-Gathering</i>	77
<i>Fieldwork Procedures</i>	77
<i>Interview Procedures</i>	79
<i>Phenomenological Interviews</i>	79
<i>Life History Interviews</i>	79
<i>Data Analysis</i>	80
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	82

<i>Credibility</i>	82
<i>Transferability</i>	84
<i>Dependability and Confirmability</i>	84
Summary	85
Transcription Note:	86
CHAPTER 5	88
RURAL IDENTITY IN HISTORY AND PRACTICE.....	88
Landscapes: An Empiricist / Rationalist Interpretation of Danville.....	89
Blood, Place, Spirit: A Cultural Interpretation of Danville	91
<i>Community by Blood</i>	91
<i>The Five Families of Danville”</i>	92\
<i>Familial Improvisations</i>	93
<i>Like Family</i>	93
<i>Making a Name</i>	95
<i>History Comes Present through Family</i>	96
<i>Community of Place</i>	99
<i>Community of Spirit</i>	106
Rural Subjectivities Identified: Claiming Country	108
Indigenous Modernities: Danville in the (Post?)Modern.....	110
Summary	114
CHAPTER 6	115
THE RURAL GAZE AND THE RURAL SELF	115
This Rural School	116
Knowing and Being Known.....	122
The Rural Gaze:	124
<i>On Being Known</i>	126
<i>NKP</i>	129
In Light of the Rural Gaze	130
<i>Bringing Danville to the Core</i>	132
Social Identity Dimensions in Danville	135
<i>Racing Rurality</i>	136
<i>Queering the Modern Rural</i>	141
Summary	144
CHAPTER 7	146
DANVILLE GOES TO COLLEGE	146
The Antinomy of Rurality and College	147

The Postsecondary Outlook from Danville.....	148
Patterns of Postsecondary Persistence in Danville	150
Preparing for College.....	155
<i>Katherine and Ethan:</i>	156
<i>Devin and Lori:</i>	161
<i>Teaching to the Test</i>	166
<i>Leigh:</i>	170
Choosing a Major.....	172
<i>It's a big mess right now"</i>	173\
The Push of College/The Pull of Country.....	175
<i>My professors know me by my name"</i>	177\
<i>Danville Football Revisited</i>	182
<i>Languishing in College</i>	183
Coming Home: The Antinomy in Resolution.....	184
Patterns of Postsecondary Persistence:.....	191
Implications for Student Involvement.....	191
Summary.....	194
 CHAPTER 8	 197
 IN CONCLUSION.....	 197
 Studying Rurality.....	 197
Findings in Relation to the First Set of Research Questions	199
<i>Barriers and Supports in College Enrollment and Persistence</i>	201
Findings in Relation to the Second Set of Research Questions	203
Rurality: At issue for Danville.....	206
Rurality: At Issue for College Student Development.....	209
Rurality: At Issue for Higher Education.....	212
 APPENDIX A.....	 216
 APPENDIX B.....	 217
 APPENDIX C.....	 219
 APPENDIX D.....	 220
 APPENDIX E.....	 221
 LIST OF REFERENCES.....	 225

VITA

January 20, 1965.....	Born – Earlville, New York
1987.....	B.S. Speech Communication Syracuse University, New York
1990.....	M.S. Student Personnel Administration State University of New York College at Buffalo, New York
1990-1993.....	Student Affairs Administrator, The University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont
1994-1996.....	Student Affairs Administrator, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts
1996-2000.....	Student Affairs Administrator, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado
2000-2001.....	Graduate Research Associate, School of Educational Policy & Leadership, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
2001-2005.....	Graduate Administrative Associate, Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
2005.....	Visiting Instructor, Educational Foundations & Interdisciplinary Studies Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Higher Education
Program: Educational Policy and Leadership

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Typology of Rural School Settings.....	56
Table 7.1: Four-Year Degree Attainment, Intention, Persistence.....	149
Table 7.2 Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence for Rural Students at the University of Iowa	151
Table 7.3 Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence from First to Second Year of College for Five First Year Students from Danville	154
Table 7.4 Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence from First to Second Year of College for Five First-Year College Students from Danville	192

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.....	47
Figure 2.2: Four Phases of the Journey toward Self-Authorship.....	51
Figure 7.1: Continuous Persistence.....	186
Figure 7.2: Modified Persistence	188
Figure 7.3: Nonpersistence	190
Figure 6.1: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity – Redrawn	212

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Because society is likened to an environment... it is possible... to think of individual persons as relating not to other persons but to society as such, and to think of relations as after the fact of the individual's personhood rather than integral to it. (Douglas & Ney, 1998, p. 9)

This ethnography is intended to illuminate cultural processes that shape the postsecondary pathways and identities of college students from rural areas. Douglas and Ney (1998) remind us that even in the present era of globalization, the interpersonal processes of culture are integral to the development of personhood. This dissertation clarifies the ways in which this was true for college-bound students from one rural town and how rurality became their guide in college decision processes.

That students from rural areas are less likely than their urban and suburban counterparts to enroll in postsecondary institutions of education in pursuit of a four-year degree has been well documented (DeYoung, 1994; Hu, 2003; Marine, 1996; Yan, 2002; Young, 2002). Of the rural students who do attend college, fewer are likely to persist to achieve their degree (DeYoung, 1994; Elliott, 1989; Feller, 1974; R. Gibbs, 1998; Yan, 2002; Young, 2002). Questions of educational aspiration and achievement have been

prevalent in research into the postsecondary pathways of rural students, which commonly assumes more and higher education as something to which rural children would quite naturally aspire (Elliott, 1989; R. Gibbs, 2000; Kent Lawrence, 1998). Rural students have been brought into focus through a lens of deficiency that magnifies their lack of educational aspiration and achievement. Less is known, though, about rural students who do aspire to a postsecondary education.

This study deepens our understanding of rural students to include not only an examination of the barriers and supports to their obtaining a baccalaureate degree, but also the social implications of their becoming college educated persons. With this understanding, policy makers and educators at all levels might better prepare to assist rural students in their developmental transitions out of high school and beyond.

Broadly conceived, this study was an investigation into the postsecondary pathways of students from a rural public school district who intended to enroll in pursuit of a four-year degree. Premised on the idea that research on college student development might be enhanced by an understanding of the cultural locations from whence students arrive, the study became an analysis of the cultural production and reproduction of rurality in one rural town (Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996; Willis, 1977). Referencing a palimpsestual image of identity rather than any reified notion of one which may at any moment be exchanged for another, this dissertation is an attempt to bring a cultural studies perspective to the body of literature that informs current understandings of human development during the college years.

From among the cognitive, psychosocial, typological, and environmental themes most common to student development theory, the establishment of identity has been

asserted as one of, if not *the* major developmental tasks for college students (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, 2003; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Kegan, 1994; McEwen, 2003). Subsequent research, however, has been critical of the foundational work of Erik Erikson in this area. Jones (1997) wrote:

His formulations of identity serve as a reference point for many models of student development. However, these models have been criticized for their over-reliance on samples of white, middle class, males and therefore fall short in describing identity issues for all. New scholarship on identity development suggests that the construction of identities must not be understood outside the frameworks of sociocultural and historical context. (*Abstract*)

In an effort to develop models that take into account frameworks of sociocultural and historical context, student development theories have been more recently developed and others revised to include many more aspects of social identity (Arnold & King, 1997; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, 2003; Evans et al., 1998; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; McEwen, 2003). Many are intended as a challenge to the homogeneity of the populations in which earlier theories were grounded, though they continue to share the “stage theory” format of Erikson’s psychosocial approach and remain true to the social aspects of his theory by contextualizing individual identity development within such broad sociocultural frameworks as race, gender, or sexual orientation.

While these broad frameworks and historical backdrops inform our understanding of college student development, they again leave the theorized individual unbound in time, place, or community. The *social* in psychosocial has gone missing, it seems, while

the concentration remains on the:

needs of a generalized human individual conceived as nonsocial or presocial... In this system of thought it is as if the subjects, individual selves, are alone with their needs... The individual is stripped of distracting attributes so that he or she is as far as possible the same as any other individual. (Douglas & Ney, 1998, pp. 5-6)

The Black student, then, becomes every Black student, the White student any White student, the woman student female, likewise the male, and so on. Yet, there is little consideration of the ways in which dimensions of identity are culturally and contextually bound in place and time. A study in *rurality*, this inquiry explored rural identities in relation to a particular place in time.

With few exceptions, psychosocial and cognitive theories of college student development are represented in stages (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, 2003; Evans et al., 1998; Kegan, 1994; King, 1978; McEwen, 2003). Notable among these theories as they are frequently portrayed in educational literature is that they begin and end with the individual student, leaving the environmental triggers said to inspire development peripheral to its processes. From certain points of view, this delimitation is appropriate, particularly in light of the deep psychological and biological changes the traditional 18-to-24-year-old student encounters during the college years. Clear evidence has been documented to show that many of these are indeed age-specific developments that are exclusive to the individual. From another point of view, however, the boundaries demarking student development processes become disputable. This study offers an alternative perspective on identity development processes, arguing the importance of place in addition to time in the

establishment of self. Echoing Madan Sarup, “We apprehend identity not in the abstract but always in relation to a given place and time” (Sarup, 1996, p. 15).

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to illuminate rural culture and the ways its processes are deployed and employed in shaping the postsecondary pathways of college students from rural areas. In so doing, the implications of these cultural processes were explored in relation to the establishment of identity among college and college-bound students from one rural town. This research concentrated on the construction of identity as a relational act in both the rural setting and the college or university setting. It centered cultural production and reproduction as important concepts in seeking to understand how student identities are forged within and against the extant structures of specified sites (Levinson et al., 1996). In essence, what value did participants place on becoming or not becoming (higher) educated persons? What happened to their senses of self and their place in community (at home or away) as a result of going to college? What were the means by which rural students adapted and/or resisted the disciplines of their environments in the formation of identity?

Significance of this Research

Nearly one in three of America's school-age children attend public schools in rural areas or small towns...Yet if you listen to the education policy debate, particularly around the impacts of the new 'No Child Left Behind' law, chances are you still will not hear much about rural schools. In most of the 50 states, they are left behind from the start. (Beeson & Strange, 2003)

The findings of this dissertation hold relevance for educational policy at the

secondary and postsecondary levels in particular. This study suggests rurality as an often overlooked demographic by which students might be identified at national, state, and regional levels for purposes of access and retention in higher education just as first-generation college students have recently been identified by many institutions of higher education for admissions purposes. Through an examination of the cultural transitions faced by rural students at home and in the college or university setting, the results of this research may serve as an impetus for the development of programs designed to minimize barriers and increase support for rural students and their families as they make the transition to higher education. Properly implemented in high school and in college, programs that take into account the particular needs of rural schools and their students may help ease the postsecondary transitions of rural students and enhance their opportunities for success in higher education.

Along with its policy implications, this project expands the range of educational literature by supplementing what little is known about students from rural areas who do, in fact, aspire to and attend college while also addressing questions of why rural high school students are less likely to aspire to higher education even when they are academically prepared to do so (Greenberg & Teixeira, 1998). Also, as a contribution to the literature, this study provides an opportunity to reconsider developmental theory from a standpoint that identifies *place* along with broader sociocultural distinctions as a key element in the development of identity at the postsecondary level. Restated, this research was designed with the intention of understanding how even broad sociocultural categories, such as race, gender, or social class, are locally and specifically constituted and how, as such, the subjectivities of rural students are produced within and against the

structures of their communities, both home and away.

Qualitative Frameworks and Research Questions

We can only make sense (however tentatively and provisionally) of our lives and surroundings by incessantly reading the texts supplied by our spaces and places, by our historical circumstances, by the political systems we inhabit, by psychological processes (both conscious and unconscious), and, of course, by the plethora of images unleashed by the media, literature and art. (Cavallaro, 2001, p. 49)

As an ethnography, this study was grounded in constructivist methodologies in its assumptions of “a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, p. 21). This research maintained that the broad, quantitative brush strokes with which the postsecondary pathways and experiences of college students from rural areas had thus far been articulated (and, indeed, with which the students themselves had been portrayed) were insufficient for understanding the role of rural culture in the lives of college students from rural areas. A longer-term and in-depth ethnographic approach was proposed in order to explore the complexity of the community norms and relationships that surround the educational decisions of rural students and their families along with the values and beliefs that inform developmental processes.

Much of what has been written about cognitive and psychosocial development at the college level employs the concept that student subjectivities are socially constructed (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Evans et al., 1998; McEwen, 2003). This project was

engrained with the notion that the stuff of which social constructions are comprised is culturally composed. College student subjectivities are inscribed and reinscribed in constant negotiation with environments both internal and external to the individual, and always in relation to the persons and ethos of their midst. Little has been documented, though, about the experiences of rural students who go to college. More research focuses on the fact that rural students are unlikely to pursue a four-year degree after high school. This study proposed to shed some light on the experiences of those who do. With the rural students participating in this project whose pathways led them to college, this research explored the ways these inscriptions were culturally informed and how they might shift from one cultural setting to another, thus influencing their decisions to enroll or persist in college.

The guiding questions in this study included:

- How are the educational aspirations of students from rural areas mediated by the rural locales of their upbringing; and
- How are identity development processes likewise mediated for those who pursue a postsecondary education at the college or university level?

A cultural studies perspective would indicate that, along with cognitive and psychological processes, which may determine one's ability to know, the spaces and places one inhabits (whether physically or virtually) inform what one can (or is allowed to) know.

Discourses are what Michel Foucault called “the structures through which subjects are fashioned” (Cavallaro, 2001, p. 90). This project encompassed an inquiry as to how the educated rural subject is fashioned first within discourses of rurality, and then re-fashioned among those of higher education. Following a review of the literature, I was

led to wonder if perhaps it is this prospect of “re-fashioning” that promotes resistance to postsecondary education in rural areas, contributes to postsecondary attrition among students from rural school districts who go to college, and at the same time holds deep meaning for the lived experiences of those who persist in pursuit of a postsecondary education.

A multi-method, multi-sited ethnography, research took place during an 18-month period from March of 2004 through August of 2005. Participants all came from the same rural town of roughly 1000 residents in Northeast Ohio and are now all graduates of the town’s unconsolidated school, which housed a total of 650 students K-12 and a graduating class of less than fifty was typical of any given year. The school district was classified by the Ohio Department of Education as “rural poor,” 99(+) percent white, evenly divided between boys and girls, and exclusively Christian.¹ Through ethnographic immersion, including methods of participant-observation, interviews, and document analysis, I worked with participants to interpret cultural meaning from what they said, the way they behaved, and the artifacts of their daily lives (Spradley, 1979) in order to explore the significance of these in their development of identity. Particular attention was given to college-bound graduates.

Limitations

While this setting and population may seem limited in terms of their potential contributions to higher education and student affairs, a field which is highly concerned with issues of diversity, there was some rationale for these particular choices. First, there is a racial distinction between rural areas of the northern United States and those in the

¹ Retrieved from the world Wide Web http://ode000.ode.state.oh.us/htbin/pupil_Profile.com; October 26th 2003.

southern United States. This sample, according to the literature on rural schools (Beeson & Strange, 2003; DeYoung, 1994; R. M. Gibbs, Swaim, & Teixeira, 1998), was highly reflective of rural populations in the northern United States and the quality measure of transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) may demonstrate its potential application for other white rural students in both northern and southern regions.

Although this study was not situated in critical theory, I am personally committed to tracking issues of social justice in my life and in my work. Privileged as I am in my own identity as white, for instance, financially provided for at this point in my life, older than the students about whom I was interested in learning, and wearing the role of “researcher,” it was important to remain vigilantly mindful of the discourses within which social identity is constructed in terms of race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, ability, educational level, and body shape and size. Noting the obvious links to the literature pertaining to identity development in higher education, these themes found their way into the analysis of the data collected here. As a qualitative analyst, it was my responsibility to see that they did so consciously and with intention.

The regional limitation of the college and university settings to those in the state of Ohio was on one hand a matter of resources available to me as a researcher, but also bounded the study in terms of the rural student transition to college. In other words, it more clearly delineated the transitional experience as one from “home community” to “college or university” rather than as a regional transition (such as, for instance, from the northeastern to the western portions of the country).

Finally, that the world can only be partially and incompletely comprehended stands as a limitation in this as in all research (Lather, 1991). My goal is not to convince

the reader that I hold or intend to discover the unassailable Truth about college students from rural areas or the ways in which our selves are socially constructed and culturally produced. Instead, I impart my interpretations of naturalistic data with the expectation that the reader test these conclusions in his or her own life and experience. To work with students from rural areas, especially those interested in pursuing a four-year postsecondary degree, perhaps the results of this study will be informative. To further appreciate the ways in which social identity might be contextually bound and culturally produced, perhaps this analysis will provide some insight, as well, with an especial consideration of rural culture and the identity development of students from rural areas.

CHAPTER 2

RURAL STUDENTS IN REVIEW: RELEVANT RESEARCH

Chapter 2 presents a review of the research pertaining to rural students, their educational aspirations and achievements, and their enrollment and persistence in college and university environments. Much of the research to be reviewed derives from large, aggregated data sets or quantitative analyses of regional and local data. In general, this body of knowledge demonstrates rural students to be at an educational disadvantage with lower educational aspirations than other students, less access to postsecondary education, and higher attrition rates once enrolled in four-year postsecondary programs. Following a review which compares and contrasts the aspirations, achievements, and cognitive development of rural school students with that of nonrural students, the chapter continues with a historical review of the research pertaining to rural students in college. Further research is then taken up as it relates to the barriers and supports to the attainment of a college education by rural students.

One theme that carries throughout this literature is what I have come to think of as *the rural deficit*. Many, in fact nearly all of the research reports may easily be framed within this theme, which implicates the intentions of research into the lives of rural students to have been the discovery of their rural deficiencies (Chappel, 2001; Hu, 2003; Lanier, 1993; Mulikin, 1987). Much of the research was designed to discover or explain what is wrong with rural children (or their environments, or their families, or their

schools, or...) who do not aspire to a higher education or who drop out once enrolled (Anderson, 1974; Aylesworth & Bloom, 1976; Cope, 1972; Downey, 1980), leaving little room for the study of those who do aspire to and persist in higher education. Following this review of literature, Chapter 3 offers an introduction to the theoretical perspectives from which this dissertation emitted in its endeavor to further our understanding of the cultural processes that serve to shape the educational aspirations and developmental processes of college students from rural areas. Chapter 3 also suggests frames for research which call into question that of the the rural deficit.

To Be a Rural Student

...achievement scores for rural high school students are slightly below those of students in metropolitan areas; high school dropout rates are higher in rural America than in metropolitan America; rural school dropouts are less likely to return to school than are those in cities; out-migration of young people who have completed high school is high, leaving more poorly educated citizens behind; and the rural college-going and college-completing rate is lower for rural high school graduates than for graduates of metro schools. (DeYoung, 1994, p. 234)

Against this backdrop, observations have been made about the educational aspirations and achievements of rural students. Though recent research shows equivalent performance on standardized tests and near equivalence in high school graduation rates between rural and nonrural students, the college attendance rates of rural students continue to lag behind (R. Gibbs, 2000). Much research into the matter reflects trends of low educational aspirations among rural students regardless of academic ability or achievement (Cowley, Meehan, Whittaker, & Carey, 2002; Fan & Chen, 1999; Khattri,

Riley, & Kane, 1997; Lee & McIntire, 1999; Paasch & Swaim, 1995; Young, 2002).

Since researchers in the 1960s and 1970s began looking into the postsecondary educational aspirations of rural students, variables confounding to the study of the effects of rural origins on college attendance and degree attainment have become evident and demanded a more nuanced analysis of the multiple factors at play in the educational aspirations, achievement, and postsecondary persistence of students from rural areas. The NELS² (National Education Longitudinal Study) data have proven particularly appropriate tools in facilitating statistical analyses of these factors.

A recent study of critical transition points in pathways to postsecondary education examined these data in the national aggregate and compared the outcome variables of educational aspirations, postsecondary access, and choice of students from rural, suburban, and urban backgrounds (Hu, 2003). This study raised school location as a “new dimension” in educational opportunity, having found that:

students in urban schools were comparatively disadvantaged in the early years in schooling in terms of postsecondary access but appeared to be enrolled in postsecondary institutions at similar percentages as their suburban counterparts, if they made it to later years in K-12 schooling... Students in rural schools were consistently disadvantaged in postsecondary aspirations and enrollment, compared to students in other schools. (Hu, 2003, Abstract)

Using the data from the 8th, 10th, and 12th graders as separate baselines, Hu (2003) found pertaining to the first outcome that rural students had lower educational aspirations, sought a high school graduation or less or a two year college education, and

² NELS 88/94 data were collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics, which surveyed a cohort of eighth graders at two year intervals from 1988 to 1994.

fewer aspired to four year colleges or graduate institutions. The second outcome variable, access, demonstrated a smaller percentage of students from rural schools enrolled in postsecondary education regardless of the baseline population used. To measure choice, students' attendance at postsecondary institutions was examined to determine the distribution of types of postsecondary institutions. Of those enrolled, larger percentages of college students from rural areas were enrolled in public institutions.

Hu's (2003) findings corroborated earlier research conducted by Raven (1990), McDermott (1997), and Yan (2002), with Raven and McDermott finding a greater percentage of rural students taking vocational courses than either urban or suburban students and Yan finding an academic, as opposed to a vocational program, a significant predictor of postsecondary enrollment.

Despite its predictive value for enrollment, related research raised cause for alarm in its investigation into the quality of the academic program in rural areas. Measuring the academic preparedness of college preparatory students in rural Pennsylvania to compete at a postsecondary level, Chappel (2001) found the majority "failed to complete a minimum sequence of courses necessary for college-level success, maintain a GPA of 80 or above [on a scale of 100], or failed to achieve at least a combined score of 800 on the SAT [on a scale of 1600]" (p. 26). This raised concerns that these students and their parents may have been misled in believing that the students were being prepared to succeed at a postsecondary level when in fact they may not have been as well prepared as others.

Providing a certain amount of hope regarding the academic performance of rural

students as compared to urban students in particular, Mulikin (1987) found in his study of rural and urban Pennsylvanian 3rd and 5th graders that rural students performed better on the state's standardized tests than the urban children in the study and Marine (1996) observed that no difference existed at the 4th and 8th grade levels in reading and math scores in Kentucky schools. Hope was subsequently dashed, however, when Marine (1996) also found that urban students attained higher scores than rural students at the 11th grade level on both counts.

The negative effects of rural residence on postsecondary expectations likewise increased in that rural residents were less likely to expect to enroll in college (Browning, 2000). Authors point again to lower educational aspirations and perhaps less motivation for high achievement in high school with such observations as:

I was surprised to discover that in 1992, when Maine students first participated in the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the nation's 'report card,' the state's fourth graders were first in the nation in math and second in reading...But recently a study has shown that Maine high school graduates are 49th in the nation in the rate at which they go to publicly funded colleges and universities and 44th in terms of private universities (Halstead, 1995) (Kent Lawrence, 1998, pp. 11-13).

Taking an ethnographic approach to the question of rural environments and postsecondary aspiration and enrollment, Kent Lawrence (1998) employed the "prism of culture and history [to] look at the immense gap between the success Maine's elementary school children achieve on the national tests and the rate at which they go on to postsecondary education" (p. v). Rather than adopting the variables and factors of other

studies, this author offered environmental elements such as the values of “hard work, independence, pragmatism, family, community, tolerance of eccentricity, love of the land, and abhorrence of debt” by which her town’s children were “taught to respect adults, work hard and graduate from high school, but a high school degree is thought sufficient” (Kent Lawrence, 1998, p. 5).

Again noting rural-urban differences, McCalley (1980) presented evidence that the cognitive development of urban high school sophomores was advanced beyond that of their rural counterparts. The author concluded that “the rate of cognitive development of the urban students was found to be more rapid than that of rural students. Rural-urban environmental factors may act as causative agents in the production of the cognitive variations measured” (*Abstract*).

Considering again cognitive development, one dissertation conceptualized as a problem of moral and conceptual development the fact that rural students were seen as thinking and responding in what the author called a traditional way, which the researcher saw as a detriment to the students because it prohibited their consideration of options and alternatives to their “traditional rural lifestyle” (Lanier, 1993, Abstract). The results of this quasi-experimental study depicted significant increases in the conceptual development of the treatment group following an 11-week intervention designed to convey communication and counseling skills while exposing students to the usual grade level curriculum. As measured by the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and the Paragraph Completion Method (PCM), there were no differences noted in terms of moral development outcomes.

In light of this research, the bulk of which compares and contrasts rural students

with nonrural students, the observation that education has historically been an urban endeavor (R. M. Gibbs et al., 1998) continues to hold merit in that urban and suburban children appear to aspire, achieve, and develop above and beyond rural children in their educational pursuits. Cognizant of these findings, one is led to wonder about the rural students who, despite the apparent odds, do aspire to and attend college. The following section provides a historical perspective of what has been investigated and discovered about this population.

Rural Students in College

Indications of low educational aspirations and a lesser likelihood of postsecondary enrollment might be understood as indicative of a different set of experiences for college students from rural areas as compared to their nonrural counterparts. Indeed, though inquiry into these experiences has been sparsely documented, it does surface from among the literature on rural students and signals that rural students are less likely to persist in college to attain their degree (Aylesworth & Bloom, 1976; Cope, 1972; Elliott, 1989; Feller, 1974). What follows is a historical perspective on this research, which began with investigations into school size at a time when small schools in the United States had theretofore been assumed to be located in rural areas.

College Students from Small (Rural) Schools

Early research painted a fairly bleak picture for the success of students from rural schools in college or university settings, demonstrating high attrition rates and difficulty adjusting to the postsecondary environment. Inconclusive though they may have been at the time, the debates concerning the impact of small school size on college experience was nonetheless begun with these early analyses. Beginning with a 1917 report, Hoyt

(1959) traced the debate through its infancy and the 19 studies he was able to locate at the time that were “related to this general area” (p. 569). Since then, the link between having been educated in a small, rural school and low postsecondary aspiration and achievement has held and the debates continue.

In 1972, intoning a certain amount of annoyance with previous conceptualizations of the problem, Cope began his publication with:

Yes, students are more likely to become dropouts, if they come from smaller communities or smaller high schools. However, the important factor is not just small size, it is the size *relationship* that exists between the former high school or community and the new college or university setting” (Cope, 1972, p. 92)

This author asserted that it is the “degree of *incongruence* between these social and academic environments” (p. 95) that may call for adjustments on the part of students from small towns and/or small graduating classes, the size of which is impossible for them to make. With this article Cope (1972) challenged previous findings that there was no relationship between school size and college performance (Altman, 1959) and that students from small high schools tended to receive lower grades once in college regardless of the congruence or incongruence between the size of the academic environments (Hoyt, 1959).

Cope’s (1972) hypothesis of incongruence received later support from an ecological study that found rural students more satisfied with the academic environments of small as opposed to large college campuses (Maples, 2001). Noting, too, that the academic performance of rural students was little different from that of metropolitan students in his study, Downey (1980) supported Cope’s (1972) assertions, suggesting that

the rural student's struggle might lie in the transition from a "social environment requiring active and continuous social involvement [to] a larger social system which may require more passive and observational modes of social interaction" (*Abstract*).

Following Cope's (1972) study by two years, research proceeded with a stratified random sample of all North Dakota high schools in existence during the academic years 1962 through 1965 and a statistical analysis of the postsecondary completion and withdrawal proportions within five strata of size (Anderson, 1974). Findings contradicted Downey's (above, 1980) later postulations with the author speculating that his findings might be explained by "the smallest schools and the *lack* of stimulation fostered by continually encountering the same few peers in the same small setting" [emphasis added] (p. 192). The only statistically significant ratio of completion to withdrawal in this study was in the first stratum, which included high schools with fewer than 20 students in their graduating class and demonstrated fewer completers at the college level compared to all other strata in the study. Findings regarding degree attainment in the remaining four strata were inconclusive, though the observation was made that the higher rate of degree attainment in stratum five (with graduating classes of 250 or more) might be linked to the higher socioeconomic status of students from the major cities from which the two schools in stratum five were derived. One recent study, however, challenged Anderson's attribution of higher scores to socioeconomic status in reporting that "the location of the university campus - separate from the downtown core" was something that eased rural students transitions to college (Deitrich, 1999, p. 92), consequently shifting the focus from socioeconomic status to school and university location.

Thus, students from small schools were generally represented in early research as struggling to adjust to the college or university setting, and those from the smallest schools likely to withdraw before completing their degree. With Anderson's (1974) study, factors other than school size entered the analytical picture and subsequent research was more likely to account for such factors as socioeconomic status and the relation of the rural school to an urban center.

College Students from Rural Areas

Investigating further the effects of rural/urban background and social class, Feller (1974) used these along with measured intelligence and academic performance as four major variables when she studied the effects of rural-urban background and social class on scholastic performance in college along with rural-urban differences in scholastic performance when controlling for demographic variables. Findings included a slight rural/urban difference in high school and college performance regardless of sex and/or social class, the predictive value of rural-urban background, social class, and sex combined was greater than any one variable individually, with the lower third of 12 types of achievers identified in the study consisting mostly of rural, middle class males.

Aylesworth and Bloom (1976) observed that lower socioeconomic status characterized the rural students in their study, as well. In this longitudinal investigation the authors again found no difference in academic potential between rural and urban students, though there was a higher drop-out rate for rural students on a semester by semester basis. Along with higher drop-out rates, rural students reported more personal problems the year prior to enrollment and felt most unsure of themselves upon college

entrance.³ They “reported far more difficulty with the university administration (primarily with work-study programs and financial aid)...reported serious dissatisfaction with the academic opportunities available to them...reported that they made excessive use of alcohol and other drugs with significant greater frequency than had urban students who left school” (p. 239). The authors concluded, “Rural students possess many of the traits commonly associated with failure in an academic setting” (Aylesworth & Bloom, 1976, p. 240).

Here the literature on rural students in college begins to hint at the environmental or cultural elements with which rural students might grapple as they transition to a college or university setting. Of the telephone survey responses collected during the study, the authors remarked:

When asked what the worst problems had been for them in their freshman year, however, rural students did not include such factors as lack of finances or difficulty with school work. Rather, rural students mentioned problems that would indicate high levels of stress and of alienation (Aylesworth & Bloom, 1976, p. 240).

These included problems of loneliness, feeling misunderstood, not handling well the freedoms of the university setting, difficulty navigating the university administration, and disappointment with their academic experience. These responses were echoed years later in a study where the researcher found that the rural and urban freshmen in her study left

³ Unfortunately, the nature of these problems was not articulated in the research report, however they might be linked to the findings of Srebalus, Bonnett, and DeLuca (Srebalus et al., 2000, p. 31) that rural students were perceived by their high school peers to have “major social and emotional problems” but remained unaware of the helping professionals available to assist them. This same study also found that school-based social services were not entirely welcomed by rural students.

at similar rates and shared academic and financial reasons for doing so, but the rural students' reasons for leaving differed in the social/interpersonal realm in that they reported less satisfying (supportive) interactions with faculty members on campus (Peters, 1990).

As context to these survey responses stands research which indicates that students from rural areas do not always make good use of support services on campus. Parsons (1992) found that rural persisters utilized university support services more readily than rural non-persisters. Rumbolt (1992) pointed out that rural persisters had more frequently sought assistance from school counselors than those who did not persist. Meanwhile, rural students at Texas A&M made use of the counseling center less frequently than their urban counterparts (Wilbourn, 1987) and the rural students at the state universities in Bolin-Reece's (1994) study had less prior experience with counseling overall and fewer family members who had sought help from mental health professionals in the past. This dovetails with Murphy's (1984) observation that rural students are more likely to use 'self change' mechanisms to cope with postsecondary stress than urban students, who are more likely to incorporate 'direct action' strategies (such as seeking help) into their coping repertoire.

The Relationship between Growing up Rural and Postsecondary Persistence

Factors affecting college attrition rates of students from rural areas remained speculative, but there was general agreement that the failure of college students from rural areas to attain their degrees had little if anything to do with the academic ability or potential of the students themselves. Kent Lawrence (1998) reported that the rural school students in her small town do very well on the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA),

but only 16.8 percent of the town's residents had any postsecondary education. She noted her state's ranking of eighteenth in the percentage of students completing high school, but twenty seventh in the percentage completing college. Of these 1990 statistics she wrote, "The gap had narrowed [since 1957], but unfortunately these percentages do not distinguish between young people who are from families that had recently migrated to the state and those who are native born" (p. 16).

Considering the same topic, but from the postsecondary rather than the local perspective, another study of college persistence saw a high drop-out rate among rural students at a large research institution (45.3 percent), even though the largest percentage had graduated within the top 9th decile of their high school classes, had on average a respectable 3.27 grade point average (on a scale of 4.0), and had fared well with an average composite ACT score of 22.4 (Elliott, 1989).

Concluding his then comprehensive review of the literature, Dennis Brown (1985) made the following recommendations:

1. Firmly establish whether or not a relationship exists between academic ability and persistence in college. If a relationship is shown to exist, examine intervention approaches that would strengthen the rural student's scholastic performance.
2. Firmly establish whether or not a relationship exists between rural students' social environment and persistence in college. If a relationship does exist, examine intervention approaches that would support a smooth transition from the rural environment to the college environment. (pp. 12 & 13)

Since their publication, attempts have been made to establish the relationships to which Brown's (1985) recommendations refer. As noted above, the relationship between academic ability and persistence in college has been identified as quite weak for rural students (Arnold & King, 1997; Aylesworth & Bloom, 1976; Downey, 1980; R. Gibbs, 1998, 2000; Greenberg & Teixeira, 1998; Hu, 2003; Yan, 2002). In general, students attending college from rural areas prove academically similar to their urban and suburban counterparts, yet they remain more likely to leave. This leaves the relationship between what Brown (1985, p. 13) called "the social environment" and persistence in college as a point of inquiry. Contextual factors are proving more significant in the educational persistence or attrition of college students from rural towns.

Exploring the relationship between certain environmental factors and college persistence, a multivariate analysis of NELS data inquired as to whom among rural students in Pennsylvania gained access to postsecondary education, how well they persisted in college, and what factors influenced their persistence (Yan, 2002). This research indicated that rural students who enrolled in postsecondary education were evenly distributed socioeconomically, more likely to be women, and were by and large unmarried. Compared to their rural peers in high school, rural college students were likely to have enrolled in the academic (as opposed to the vocational) program, to have taken the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and were more likely to have been surrounded by friends and peers who considered studying to be somewhat-to-very important. Their parents typically expected them to go to college or graduate school and did not expect them to attend vocational school.

The rural students in this sample (Yan, 2002) who persisted once enrolled in

college were concentrated in the middle and high socioeconomic brackets, more likely to be men, and were, again, likely to be single. Rural persisters had a higher percentage of friends who ended their education with high school than did their urban or suburban counterparts. They had more and various types of financial aid than rural drop-outs or late enrollees, were slightly more likely than urban or suburban students to attend college in their home state, and were more likely to attend the college of their first choice, which was typically a four-year institution.

Rural students who dropped out of college were evenly distributed among the low, middle, and high socioeconomic statuses and rural women were more likely to drop out than rural men. Those who dropped out were less likely to apply first to a four-year institution and more likely to apply to a two-year college first. They were less likely to attend the college of their first choice and more likely than their urban or suburban peers to attend a two-year public institution.

Speaking more directly to Brown's above-noted research agenda, the factors holding predictive significance for the postsecondary enrollment and persistence of rural Pennsylvanian students were identified and included the demographic variables of socioeconomic status, which was significant in persistence, gender, which was predictive of enrollment, and marital status, which contributed to both enrollment and persistence. Other variables of significance included those pertaining to high school experience, such as an academic versus a vocational program, the number of science and math courses taken, and having sat for the SAT, all of which proved significant for both enrollment and persistence. Toward enrollment, receipt of a diploma as opposed to a GED was indicative. The only variable under educational expectations that showed significance

was having discussed college with one's parents, which contributed to both enrollment and persistence for rural students. Having various types of financial aid was predictive of persistence along with college major. Rural students who dropped out were less likely than persisting students to major in math or science. [See Table 2.1 for a summary of significant variables (Yan, 2002)]

Factors Showing Significance for the Enrollment and Persistence Rural Students in Postsecondary Education		
Demographics	Enrollment	Persistence
Socioeconomic Status		*
Gender	*	
Marital Status	*	*
High School Experience		
Program (academic over vocational)	*	*
Science and Math (courses taken)	*	*
Diploma over GED	*	
SAT (having taken the exam)	*	*
Social Integration		
Importance of Study Among Friends		
Plans for College		
Educational Expectations		
Father		
Mother		
Student		
Parental Discussion	*	*
Postsecondary Experiences		
Number of Types of Financial Aid		*
Type of Institution		
First Choice College		
College Major		*

* indicates finding of statistically significant effect

Table 2.1: Table of significant variables (Yan, 2002)

Taking an ethnomethodological approach derived from phenomenology and what the author referred to as the “sociology of everyday life” (Elliott, 1989, p. 80) another study combined theoretical perspectives on college student persistence (see, for example, Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1987) with cognitive and psychological processes such as schemas, self-efficacy, and social integration to achieve the major purpose of her study, which was “to generate hypotheses toward the development of an explanatory model of rural persistence” in college (Elliott, 1989, p. 11). Following interviews with 12 university students from rural schools identified as university persisters and 10 as nonpersisters, the researcher hypothesized that:

For rural high school graduates, persistence/nonpersistence is inappropriately and inaccurately depicted as a dichotomy. For students who graduate from small rural schools, persistence/nonpersistence is most accurately represented as a continuum [, which]...extends from enrollment into the university with subsequent uninterrupted persistence, to enrollment into the university with subsequent withdrawal from the entire educational system...six points along the continuum were identified. (Elliott, 1989, p. 211)

To the six points on the continuum, the ability to integrate the cognitive schemas of *back home* and *the new world* were corresponded. A student’s inability to integrate the two schemas would indicate a point on the continuum nearer to nonpersistence while the ability to integrate the two would indicate a point closer to persistence. The author also theorized her results by relating levels of self-efficacy (the higher the self-efficacy the closer to persistence on the continuum) and social integration (the higher the inability to integrate socially, the closer to nonpersistence on the continuum). Her study concluded:

The findings of this study suggest a tentative model of persistence/nonpersistence for the graduates of small rural high schools who enroll at a large research institution. Rural students in possession of a rural schema (back home) make a variety of self-appraisals, directly related to their sense of self-efficacy, as they seek to interpret and construct their social reality by balancing ‘making the grade’, ‘fitting in’, and ‘creating a home away from home’. (Elliott, 1989, pp. 211-213)

With these studies, elements of rural environments were more specifically correlated with the enrollment and persistence patterns of rural youth in higher education. Factors of significance to the educational environments of rural areas, such as socioeconomic status and parental/familial encouragement toward a postsecondary degree, were identified as were the abilities of rural students to integrate the cognitive schemas identified by Elliott (1989). The following section offers further explication of some of these factors which stand as barriers and supports to the postsecondary persistence of college students from rural areas.

Barriers and Supports to College Enrollment and Persistence

Parental and Family Expectations

Parental and family expectations have been shown to be the most powerful predictor of college attendance for rural students (Day-Perroots, 1992; Parsons, 1992; Schutz, 2003; M. H. Smith, 1995; Tharpe, 1997; Wenstrom, 1981; Yan, 2002).

Problematic is the fact that educational attainment remains low in rural areas with fewer rural parents prepared to place emphasis on higher education. This has been attributed to the fact that fewer educated adults remain in rural areas following their out-migration as young people to colleges and universities, leaving a fragile educational scaffolding in

their wake (DeYoung, 1994; R. Gibbs, 1998). While that which is known about students from rural areas who attend college and their postsecondary experiences remains limited, of one thing rural scholars are certain: once rural students leave for college, they are unlikely to return.

For many years the conventional wisdom passed on to rural youth by family, friends, counselors, and teachers has been to stay in school, go on to college and from there to a city where the better paying jobs are located. Rural youth by the millions followed that advice and, in so doing, provided a steady stream of one of the most economically valuable exports from rural America -- human capital.

(Hobbs, 1998, p. *vii*)

One may note here the contrast between the values of college and better paying jobs as expressed in the above quotation and the values noted by Kent Lawrence (1998) in the last section, such as family, community, respect for adults, and the sufficiency of a high school degree.

First-Generation College Student Status

In many ways related to the above perceived barrier is another factor which relates to postsecondary enrollment and persistence, that is status as a first-generation college student. As first generation students, rural students are twice marginalized by their lack of knowledge of higher education (Schutz, 2003), unlikely to receive this knowledge from their rural families or from their community. Schutz (2003) noted that the negative effects are compounded by an agricultural background, which may increase feelings of “differentness” for these students in the college or university setting. Deitrich (1999) also found that “having friends from secondary school at the same university [and]

having siblings, relatives or friends who were currently attending or had attended university previously” (p. 91) assisted in easing the transition from high school to postsecondary education for the rural students in her study.

The Impact of Race

Not to be overlooked in a discussion of barriers and supports are issues of race. Race remains a factor in college enrollment and persistence for rural students with 18.6 percent of students enrolled in rural schools nationwide being people of color (Beeson & Strange, 2003). Although Greenberg and Teixeira (1998) reported on their finding that rural students of color made significant educational gains over rural white students during the 23-year period from 1974-1996, Tharpe (1997) found students in her study grappling with the “remnants of racial bias that undermine self-confidence and fragment rural culture” (*Abstract*). Though difficult to decipher from Greenberg and Teixeira’s statistical configurations, it appears that white students continue to experience educational advantages that students of color do not, despite their noted gains represented by the aggregated data.

Perhaps most telling is a study authored at the University of Houston, *Differences Among High School Students’ Mathematics Achievement Based On School Location, School Socioeconomic Status, And Student Ethnicity* (Hsieh, 2002). Making comparisons by race and socioeconomic status, Hsieh (2002) found that the math scores of suburban students were higher than rural students and that there was no statistical difference in rural-urban scores. Scores followed a standard high-, middle-, and low-income pattern, with higher income students scoring higher and indicating that socioeconomic status was more influential on the measured outcome than school location. As well, the higher

scores of White students showed statistical significance overall as compared to Hispanic and African American students and this was consistent throughout the results (by ethnicity and socioeconomic status).

Rurality remained a factor of significance among groups of the same ethnicity, however, with Gandara, Gutierrez, and O'Hara (2001) finding that the rural Hispanic American students in their study were more like their rural White American counterparts in their perspectives on postsecondary plans than they were like their urban Hispanic American counterparts. Rurality was also a significant factor for rural Black women in the United States, too, who in 1975 "lagged 2.9 school years behind metro black women...[while r]ural black women living on farms finished an average of only 8th grade, a full 4.0 grades behind metro black women," indicating the (Chu, 1980, p. 5).

Financial Constraints

Matters of economy are a frequently reported concern for rural students in college, those who drop-out as well as those who persist (Aylesworth & Bloom, 1976; Day-Perroots, 1992; Feller, 1974; Schutz, 2003; Yan, 2002). The women in Day-Perroots' study (1992) named finances the biggest barrier to obtaining their postsecondary education, while the educational persistence of rural students in college was found by Tharpe (1997) to be in large part dependent on the students' ability to identify and obtain financial resources. Meanwhile, the older undergraduates in another study were more likely to enroll in college as a means to eventual financial gain (Hicks, 1998).

In light of the facts that the average per capita income in rural areas is about \$19,000 (compared to \$26,000 in urban areas) and 14 percent of the 55 million people living across the rural landscapes of the United States lives below the poverty level

(compared to eleven percent in cities), it is easy to see how rural economies might be hard pressed to support a postsecondary education (*Census 2000*, 2000). Fitzgerald (2004) recently wrote of college tuition and financial aid policy:

Two decades of underfunding of grant aid, the substitution of loans, and the more recent focus on tax credits and merit-based aid have erected substantial financial barriers to college for low- and moderate-income students... To ensure enrollment, families of low-income students must commit \$8,200, one third of family income each year, in the form of work and loans by the parents and the student. (p. 7)

This, the author noted, is for a “moderately priced four-year public college,” which, based on the averages noted above, would amount to a full 43 percent of the average rural family’s income. Rural scholar Gibbs (1998) sums up with, “The large and longstanding gap between rural and urban incomes may be the most powerful constraint on college attendance” (p. 67).

“Finding a Place to Be”

“...college tuition is a daunting barrier, however, it is only a small part of the reason... students do not pursue postsecondary education” (Kent Lawrence, 1998, p. v). The same might be said of rural school districts where socio-economic status as well as lack of familial support, first-generation status, and/or racial bias may at any time pose daunting barriers. Combined, they may comprise only part of the reason rural students do not persist in post secondary education. Although these themes of deficiency have been demonstrated as predictive factors and barriers with which colleges students from rural areas frequently contend, the students, when given the opportunity, cite other reasons for their disengagement or withdrawal from the college or university environment.

Though many of the research reports focus on factors and variables, a careful reading notes the reports of “alienation” and feeling “misunderstood” (p. 240) which were discussed by the rural students in Aylesworth and Bloom (1976), the noted lack of support rural students felt on campus in Peters (1990), the insecurity of those in Day-Perroots (1992), and the expressed dissatisfaction with the large campus environment discovered by Maples (2001). There was also the extreme sense of “differentness” of which Schutz (2003) wrote, with one participant observing on “a mournful, lonesome note that campus life ‘...is, it’s [a] completely different culture here. Maybe I just don’t fit into this. I don’t know what it would be, I guess because I don’t feel that I fit into the college scene” (p. 72).

The literature speaks plainly to the fact that it is rarely a deficit in academic ability on the part of rural students that leads to discrepancies in the college enrollment and persistence rates of rural versus nonrural students. As well, rural students themselves are not naming the other elements which have been framed within the rural deficit. What, then, might be persuading rural youth to drop out of college in larger numbers or never to enroll? Preliminary interviews for this dissertation research echoed the answers that were just touched upon in previous findings.

Of her first semester in college, Lucy⁴ said, “Like, definitely the academic experience was not the focus...Not at all. [It was] the social part of it...just, you know, *finding a place to be*” [emphasis spoken in the interview] (interview transcript, Lucy, 02/02/02). This respondent was a highly gifted straight-A high school graduate as she made the transition from her rural hometown to an urban college, where she failed her

⁴ Pseudonym used throughout.

first semester and eventually dropped out to complete her undergraduate degree in two years some 25 years later. Had academic potential or financial aid or race been the determining factors, Lucy might likely have persisted to degree 25 years earlier, but as a college student from a rural area, she was left with the confounding task of “...the social part of it...just, you know, *finding a place to be.*”

A Study in Rural Culture

Referencing again the interviews conducted as a prelude to the current project, Lucy’s citation of “the social part of it” (above) hearkens back to Brown’s (1985) recommendation to determine the relationship between the rural student’s “social environment” and persistence in college. What might differentiate a rural student’s social environment - at home or in college - from that of, say, an urban student, given that certain of the same elements might be at play in both instances, such as financial constraint, lack of parental/familial support, or first-generation status, for example? What peculiarities are there in rural environments that distinguish the postsecondary experiences of college students from rural areas, whether or not they choose to persist to degree? This research submits that the distinctions evolve from the cultural processes by which educational aspirations are shaped, from which the subjectivities of college students from rural areas are fashioned, and upon which rural students call as they negotiate the developmental tasks of higher education. Guided by the ethnographic design of Kent Lawrence’s (1998) study of educational aspirations in high school, and Elliott’s (1989) phenomenological exploration of the balancing act for rural students in college, the intention of the extant project was to investigate the establishment of rural subjectivities, their role in shaping the educational aspirations and experiences of rural

students, and the negotiation of rural identities in college.

Following her mixed-methods analysis of the transitions of rural students to a postsecondary environment, Dietrich (1999) recommended in-depth analysis and an exploration of “the *role* of higher education for rural students. Where does it fit in? What practical purpose does it serve? Eliciting student descriptions of a ‘rural lifestyle’, and tapping into their feelings about their own rural lifestyles. Pursuing the concept of a rural identity...and how [a] university experience affects it” (Deitrich, 1999, p. 101). These recommendations speak to the heart of this research project as its analysis trundles between the influences of rural culture on the identity development and postsecondary ambitions of rural students and the experiences of those pursuing a postsecondary education. By following the educational flows of college-bound graduates from one rural town as they negotiated and navigated their postsecondary lives, this study serves as a contextual bridge between others that have inquired of rural students in their schools and those that have made their inquiries at the college level.

Summary

Having been characterized most frequently in broad, quantitative terms, rural students are often viewed to be at educational risk (DeYoung, 1994). The literature here reviewed found rural students to have lower educational aspirations than others, to have lower grades in high school than in elementary school and lower grades than urban high school students, as well as to be lagging in college enrollment and persistence. Much of this research was conducted from within a framework of rural deficiency, which unquestioningly assumed more and higher education to be a benefit. Much inquired as to why rural students did not aspire to a higher education or were more likely to drop out if

they did enroll. Very few of these reports focus on students from rural areas who did, in fact, aspire to, enroll, and persist in pursuit of a four-year postsecondary degree. Of the two authors who did include rural persisters at the university level, one (Yan, 2002) offered a broad, quantitative analysis and the other (Elliott, 1989) made use of cognitive constructs in her analysis, for which she relied solely upon the retrospective interviews conducted in the postsecondary setting. Only one study dealt with the influences of rural culture on educational aspirations at any level and those were the elementary and secondary school levels (Kent Lawrence, 1998). None bridge the gap between the rural area and the postsecondary environment.

This study bridges the gap between the rural school district and the postsecondary environment through its examination of the cultural processes of one rural town and their subsequent impact on the postsecondary pathways of its high school graduates. Its primary focus was those who were academically qualified to pursue a four-year postsecondary degree and also those who went (or had gone) on to enroll in a four-year postsecondary degree program. One intention of its design was to trace those elements that inform the postsecondary decisions of rural students and their families, recognizing that the decision not to pursue a higher degree may be as much a matter of value as deficit.

This dissertation seeks to describe the impact of rural culture on patterns of postsecondary persistence. Perhaps the resistance to higher education in its many articulations (i.e. lower academic achievement in high school, lower enrollment rates in postsecondary education, higher attrition from the college or university setting, etc.) is not a matter of rural deficiency as much as an assertion of rural identity. This, in light of

the six-point continuum of postsecondary persistence developed by Elliott (above, 1989), seemed worthy of investigation, not necessarily in terms of the rural student's *ability* (as so many others have conceptualized persistence) to integrate concepts of themselves as rural and college educated, for example, but also in terms of their *willingness* to do so.

CHAPTER 3

STUDYING RURALITY:

KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

...But isn't this the way with facts?

That though they want to hold
the truth, they cannot always
contain it perfectly.

As the hand that brings
water to the mouth sometimes
lets it slip through
the fingers' slats or
sometimes lets it overflow...

(From *Blessed Coming Off Ladders* (Gross, 1995, p. 5))

Chapter 3 locates this dissertation within the theoretical frameworks from which it grew. Here, the conceptual underpinnings of this inquiry into the educational pathways of rural students are elaborated to illustrate the multifaceted theoretical milieu in which this research was undertaken.

As stated in the first chapter, this project is an attempt to bring a cultural studies perspective to the body of knowledge that informs our understanding of human development during the college years. At its most basic, "cultural studies involves an examination of how the history people live is produced by structures that have been

handed down from the past” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b, p. 161). Cultural studies concerns itself with the texts of culture, lived experience, and the articulation of the two (*Ibid.*). Like Foucault (1991b) in the historical genre, who sought answers to generalized questions through specific inquiries (e.g. questions of power through inquiries of prison), I sought answers to questions of identity through an inquiry of place. Focusing on structural determinants and lived meaning, this study employed anthropological methods to problematize the standpoint of the rural deficit as it was revealed in the review of literature and to reconsider some of the assumptions underlying much of the identity development theory now rote among higher education and student affairs professionals.

Though they frequently assume tacit meaning, what follows is an elucidation of the complexity of concepts like *culture*, *rurality*, and *identity*. Even as they serve to complicate extant theory, the terms of analysis are themselves layered with meaning. This chapter ponders questions of culture as it provides an in-depth discussion of this key concept brought to push current thinking on college student identity. For those less familiar with college student development, the chapter provides a glance at the origins of that body of theory, and a brief review of its evolution in the cognitive and psychosocial realms. Its assumption that college student development begins and ends with the student’s arrival and departure from higher education is challenged with questions of where culture is located and when identity begins. Answers to these questions, as the excerpt at the top of this chapter implies, are not unambiguous.

The Bifurcation of the College Student:

A Historical Perspective on Student Affairs Work

That education is a powerful force is inarguable. Used as a means to promote culture, as in the education of the early democracies (Bowen, 1981), a means of preserving culture, as in early attempts to preserve farm life in the United States (Schewel, 1982), and a means of stamping out culture, as in Western imperialist projects (Butts, 1976) and the “civilizing” missions enacted against indigenous peoples (Jensen, 1984), its effects are undeniable. To paraphrase Julius Nyerere (Nyerere, 1974), education *is* the transmission of culture from one generation to the next.

As noted among the founding documents in the field of higher education and student affairs (*The student personnel point of view*, 1937) and consistently observed as integral to its history, the influence of the German research model as adapted to American shores served to change the culture of higher education in the United States and the nature of the faculty’s relationship to the postsecondary student (Appleton, Channing, & Rhatigan, 1982; Evans, 2003; Lucas, 1994, among others). As the field of student affairs took shape a “rapidly growing and heterogeneous population of students entered higher education needing substantive assistance in other than curricular matters at approximately the time much of higher education was jettisoning that responsibility” (Appleton et al., 1982). As a consequence, the transmission of culture to which Nyerere (1974, above) referred became of concern. Gone were the days of live-in faculty and clergy serving as teaching mentors to students inside and outside of the classroom, but keen was the need on the part of students that the residual void be filled.

Thus, student affairs took its place within institutions of higher education and the

conceptualization of the postsecondary student became bifurcated within a system that divided the development of the student in the classroom from that which occurs out of the classroom. Although an enduring characteristic of student development has been its insistence that higher education continue to cultivate the student as a whole, student development has become synonymous with the out of class experience on campus while the faculty remains focused on surviving the teach, serve, publish or perish atmosphere of the academic career.

Student Development Theory

Student development theory provides the basis for the practice of student development. Knowledge of student development theory enables student affairs professionals to proactively identify and address student needs, design programs, develop policies, and create healthy college environments that encourage positive growth in students. (Evans et al., 1998)

Since the publication of the first *Student Personnel Point of View* (1937), the literature that guides the student affairs profession in addressing the developmental needs of college students has steadily grown. The year 1978 saw a first attempt to bring a sense of organization to the rapidly growing number of theories pertaining to college student development (Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978). Since then, student development theory has typically been apportioned into four major theoretical frameworks: theories of psychosocial development, theories of cognitive development, models of typology, and campus environment or ecological models (see, for example, Evans et al., 1998; Knefelkamp et al., 1978; Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 2003). Focusing on intellectual growth as well as affective and behavioral changes during the college years,

student development theory offers a context of constancy for the otherwise disparate set of functional and administrative responsibilities of the student affairs professional (Knefelkamp et al., 1978).

It is among the out-of-class student development themes of psychosocial and cognitive development that the seeds of this dissertation were planted. From among these theoretical families, the establishment of identity is generally accepted as one of the major developmental tasks to be addressed by students at the postsecondary level. Problematic, however, is that student development theory begins and ends with processes individual to the student. “In this system of thought it is as if the subjects, individual selves, are alone with their needs in a world consisting of objects... No one else is there” (Douglas & Ney, 1998, pp. 5-6). College students have been positioned as anthropology has been accused of situating the non-western Other, namely “historyless...[and having] constructed their lives for our purposes” (Sahlins, 1999pp. ii-v) so that we in higher education might better understand ourselves and human development processes.

At issue, then, is that the greater part of student development theory - whether in or out of the classroom - leaves the theorized individual unbound in time or place, while at the same time alluding to the importance of context in the development of the student (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000). This study examined the influence of context on student development, specifically the establishment of identity. Maintaining that social realities are individually *and* collectively constructed, “...I want[ed] to argue, first, that any study of identity must be localized in space and time” (Sarup, 1996, p. 15).

Psychosocial Perspectives on College Student Development

Those found in the theoretical lineage begun with Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development maintain the common thread that individual identity development depends at least in part on the interaction of the individual with environmental factors, as well as the influences of the personality of the individual. "According to Erikson (1959), each new stage occurs when internal psychological and biological changes interact with external social demands to create a developmental crisis, or turning point, in a person's life" (Evans, 2003, p. 180). In this way, psychosocial development is differentiated from its psychosexual predecessor, which focused almost exclusively on conflicts internal to the individual.

Arthur Chickering was among the first to clarify Erikson's *Stage V: Adolescence (Young Adulthood)* with an identity development model for use with college students (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Of his oft referenced model of college student development Chickering is quoted, "At one level of generalization, all the developmental vectors could be classified under the general heading 'identity formation'" (Widick, Kniefelkamp, & Parker, 1978).

Critical of early theorists for their "over-reliance on samples of White, middleclass males" (Jones, 1995), there has been a proliferative response on the part of theorists concerned with dimensions of social identity. These psychosocial theories, largely represented as linear models, include Rita Hardiman and Bailey Jackson's early work on racial identity development and, later, their *Model of Social Identity Development* (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). Additional theories of identity concentrate more specifically on race and include Cross' *Model of*

Psychological Nigrescence, Helms' *White Identity Development Model* (see Evans et al., 1998; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001), and McEwen has also worked to incorporate the considerations of African-American and Asian-American students into psychosocial theories of student development (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2002; McEwen, Roper, Bryant, & Langa, 1990). Theories of ego identity processes of women and girls were established by Loevinger and Josselson (Knefelkamp et al., 1978), and various theories of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identity development have followed Cass' (1979) *Model of Homosexual Identity Formation*, such as Fassinger's (1998) emerging *Inclusive Model of Lesbian/Gay Identity Formation* and D'Augelli's anti-essentialist, anti-stage "process theory" of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Identity (see Evans et al., 1998).

From this sampling of social identity theory that has made its way into the consciousness of higher education and student affairs, it is easy to see that many are intended as a challenge to the homogeneity of the white, middle-class, presumably heterosexual male populations in which psychosocial theory was originally grounded. Constructed against broad sociocultural backdrops, however, they do not discuss the "relational component to the construction of identity...and how it is that groups construct identities inside specified sites" (Levinson et al., 1996, pp. x-xi). In other words, they do not take into account the ways in which identity is locally and specifically constituted.

Establishing Identity in Context

The conceptual *Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity* presented by Jones and McEwen (2000) is one of the few identity models that links specific contextual factors to processes of college student development, specifically those of identity. Throughout

their article, the authors variously affirm that the “[i]nfluences of sociocultural conditions, family background, and current experiences cannot be underestimated in understanding how participants constructed and experienced their identities” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). These, along with career decisions and life planning, are listed in the model as context for the multiple identity processes taking place [see Figure 2.1]. The authors left the context unaddressed, however, stating that their model only “hints at factors that contribute to the development of identity (e.g. contextual influences)” (p. 412).

Magnifying elements of the “context” as it was presented by Jones and McEwen (2000) the present research sought to foreground the power of the specified site(s) as it influenced the development of college students from a small, rural town and school district. As previously discussed, this research identifies context (or *place*) as an important developmental influence along with the broader sociocultural distinctions, such as those of gender, race, culture, class, religion, and sexual orientation found in Jones and McEwen’s model. With elements of context, identity as it has thus far been theorized, becomes a troubled term in that it may be differently produced and differently experienced from one type of place to another.

Cognitive Perspectives on College Student Development

Though most theories of identity found within the student development rubric fall under psychosocial development, theories of cognition, or complexity of thought, are

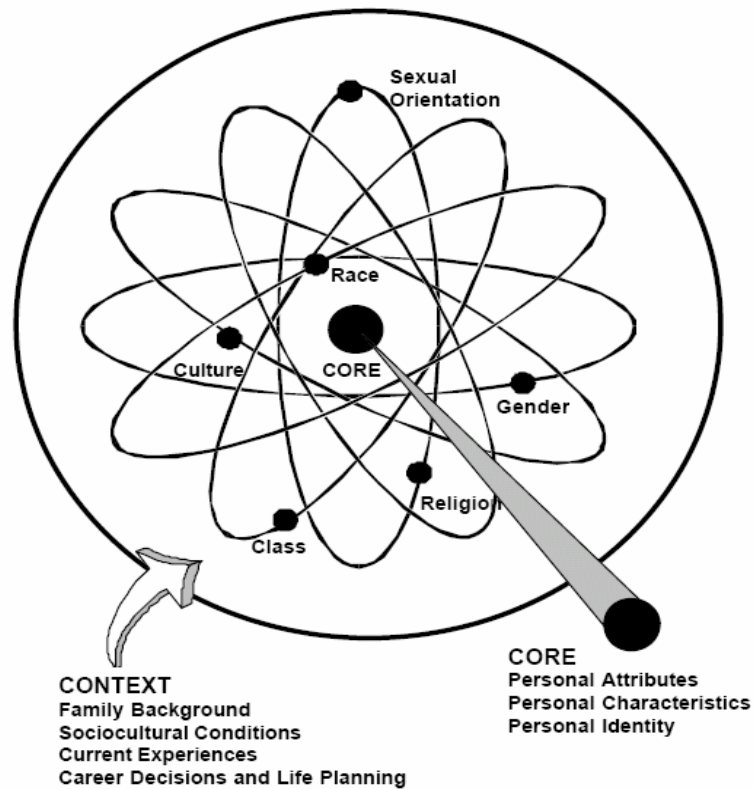


Figure 2.1: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 407)

more and more frequently brought into play. Like psychosocial development, cognitive-structural development has also been conceptualized in stages. Examined first by Jean Piaget, who was concerned with ways in which individuals interpret and process information, “[c]ognitive structural stages are viewed as arising sequentially and always in the same order, regardless of cultural conditions. Each stage derives from the previous one, incorporating aspects of it, and is qualitatively different and more complex than earlier stages” (Evans, 2003, p. 187). Most theories of cognition, such as those of

William Perry, Lawrence Kohlberg, or Carol Gilligan, speak to the progression of moral and ethical reasoning from less to more complex (see Evans, 2003; Evans et al., 1998; Gilligan, 1982; A. F. Smith, 1978). The *Reflective Judgment Model* developed by Kitchener and King (1994) illustrates how people arrive at their beliefs about what they know, and again progresses from simple to more complex throughout the seven stages that identify thought as pre-reflective, quasi-reflective, or reflective.

Scholars and practitioners alike have recently called for a more integrated approach to understanding the cognitive development processes of college students. King and Baxter Magolda (2005), for instance, in their discussion of intercultural maturity illustrate the complexity of the maturation process in which the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains are interrelated. Basing their conceptualization of maturity on the concept of “mature capacity” (Kegan, 1994; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, p. 574), they wrote that maturity is evidenced by an ability to integrate “a wide variety of skills, understanding, and developmental capacities” comprised of “an adequate knowledge base...reasoning abilities...social skills...and personal attributes” (King & Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 4). King and Baxter Magolda echo Kegan’s (1994) argument that maturity requires development in all three domains – cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal – and further assert that development in each is interdependent with the others.

In *In Over Our Heads*, Kegan (1994) authored a theory of adult development that diverges from more narrowly iterated theories of student development. Taking a broader view of adult development, he conceived of development as an evolution of ways of knowing and making meaning which utilize ever-increasing capacities for complexity

“not merely...for how one thinks, but for how one constructs experience more generally, including one’s thinking, feeling, and social-relating” (Kegan, 1994, p. 32). Kegan’s theory is not focused on the content of *what* one knows but rather on *how* one organizes one’s thinking, feeling, and social relating. He identified the various methods of meaning making as “orders of consciousness” and described the shift from the third to the fourth order as the major developmental task of transitioning to and through adulthood. Taken from this point of view, the major task of higher education and student affairs might be to create the kinds of environments and experiences that assist in this particular developmental transition.

Self-Authorship: A More Integrated Approach

Baxter Magolda (2001) followed the transition of a group of college graduates as they moved from third to fourth order thought. This time is characterized by a shift from an externally defined sense of self to an internally designed identity. In Kegan’s (1994) model, the manifestation of an internally designed identity is seen as an exemplification of maturity that he labels “self-authorship” (p. 185). Of self-authorship Kegan (1994) wrote, “It is qualitatively more complex.... This new whole is an ideology, an internal identity, a *self-authorship* that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent values, beliefs, convictions, generalizations, ideals, abstractions, interpersonal loyalties, and intrapersonal states” (p. 185).

Figure 2.2 illustrates the phases through which participants in Baxter Magolda’s (2001) study traversed on their way to self-authorship. The first phase is characterized as “following external formulas,” the second as a “crossroads.” The third phase is reflected in the stories of the participants as “becoming the author of one’s life” and the fourth as

having established an “internal foundation.” It was Baxter Magolda’s (2001) conclusion that the experiences of her study’s participants were aptly characterized by the title of Kegan’s (1994) book, *In Over Our Heads*. “Inherent in the stories are multiple circumstances in which participants needed an internal definition to function effectively. To conduct their professional and personal lives productively, they really needed to achieve self-authorship earlier than most of them did” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 188).

Self-Authorship in Context

Of significance to this research project is that the participants in Baxter Magolda’s (2001) research continued to follow external formulas throughout the majority of their college years, reaching the crossroads late in college or following graduation altogether. Becoming the authors of their own lives and discovering their internal foundation would wait in most cases until their late twenties. If, like the participants in Baxter Magolda’s (2001) study, rural students seek external formulas for making meaning of their life experiences, inquiring as to the contexts from which those formulas derive as they transition out of high school would be informative in understanding the other-authored subjectivities with which they arrive and make their way through higher education.

Also of significance to this research is the work of Pizzolato (Pizzolato, 2003), who theorized that for students at high risk of academic failure or early withdrawal from college, self-authorship may take place much sooner than for those of Baxter Magolda’s study. Pizzolato’s formulations leave room to consider that rural subjectivities may be well developed *before* rural students arrive and make their way through higher education.

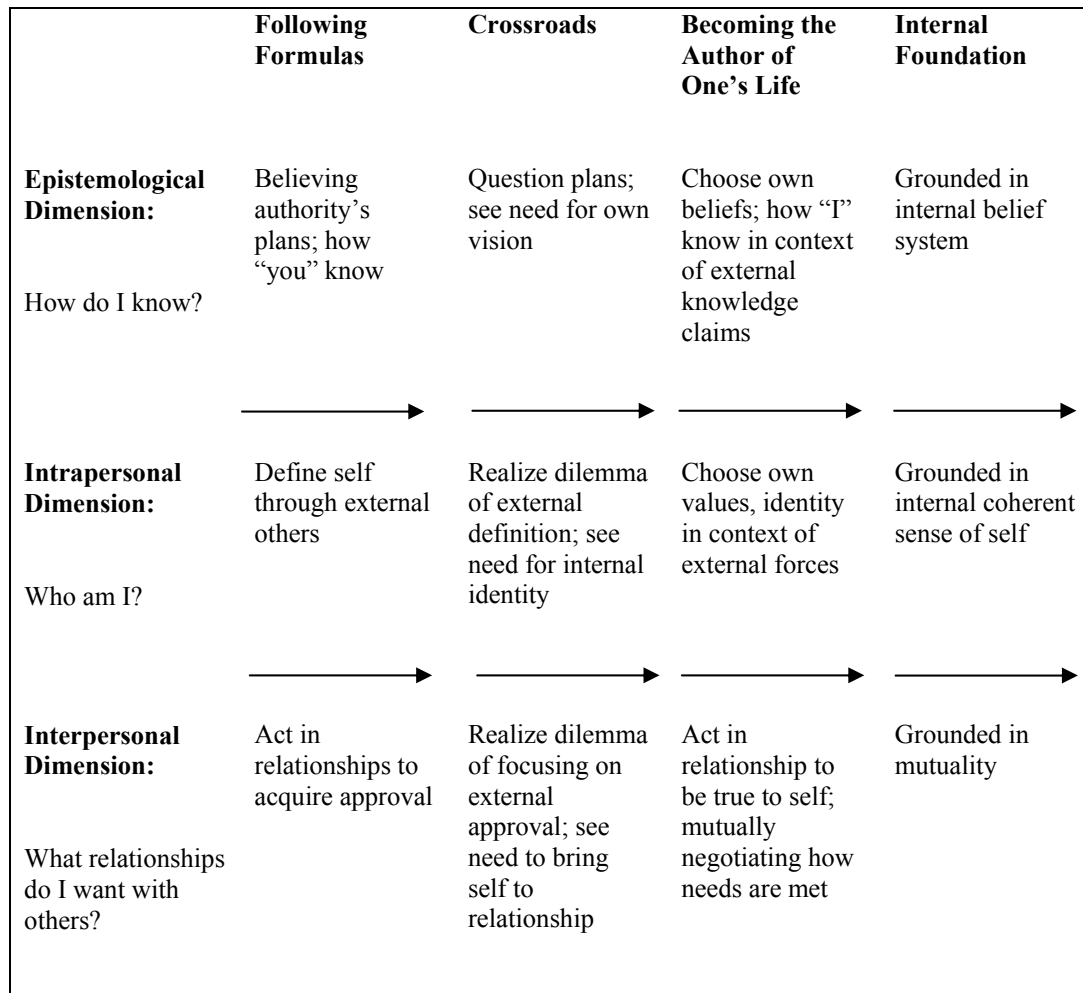


Figure 2.2: Four Phases of the Journey toward Self-Authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 40)

Bringing Culture to the Developmental Mix

A cultural studies perspective would suggest that the external formulas (or discourses) by which subjectivities are fashioned and which are mobilized in the making of meaning are differently constructed from culture to culture and are likely to produce results unique to students of different cultures. While student development is frequently

discussed in terms of “universal concepts in a realm separate from material reality” (Cavallaro, 2001, p. 6), students are nonetheless situated in their histories - as are their identities, their ways of making meaning, and their ways of relating to the world around them. Along with stages of cognition and psychosocialization, this study suggests histories of time and place are also important in theorizing the development of students.

Getting in touch with the histories / discourses / external formulas of a group of students from a particular time and a particular type of place was the aim of this research. Locating culture, through which personhood is understood and subjectivity constituted (Harris, 2001) and which might make all the difference in the educational pathways upon which rural students embark, was its endeavor. This dissertation provides insight into the contexts (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and external formulas (Baxter Magolda, 2001) that inform the developmental processes of rural students who go to college.

Culture is defined as “the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations” (*Dictionary*, 2000, p. 282). Culture has also been ascribed to as “that body of knowledge passed on through learning (in contrast to genetically transmitted)” (Kent Lawrence, 1998, p. 34). Others discuss culture in terms of the systems of meaning with which we make sense of the world (D'Andrade, 1984/P. Demerath, personal communication, Autumn 2002). For the purposes of the extant project, a combination of these notions was drawn upon. Here, *culture* was used to signify the systems of meaning with which people make sense of the world and which are transmitted to others through the human processes of teaching and learning.

Locating Culture

Since its beginning, the anthropological enterprise has centered on the study of culture. Pioneers in post-positivist research methods, early anthropologists proposed *going there* to understand from the ground up lived experience(s) within cultural contexts. They used ethnography to “study a group of people who lived in a culture that was remote and quite different from their own” (Glesne, 1999). Adapting the anthropological approach to more local research interests, sociologists then turned the ethnographic gaze upon groups within their own culture(s) rather than those remote. Since then, ethnographic and other qualitative research methods have been found widely apposite by disciplines as varied as cultural studies, education research, medicine, and queer studies.

With methodological roots in anthropology, the appeal of qualitative research is that it describes social phenomena in cultural contexts. Qualitative research methods continue to be mobilized to understand how culture operates within a given context. Although the intention of the anthropological approach has been to problematize culture, those “systems of meaning with which we make sense of the world” (D'Andrade, 1984/P. Demerath, personal communication, 2002), it seems that culture itself is the troubled term, of late. One troubling agent is globalization, and another is postmodernism. The first blurs lines between the local and the global. The second gives pause to question, as we go there to develop an understanding, whether there is a there *there* (P. Lather, personal communication, Spring 2002).

Rural culture has not been exempted from postmodern configurations of cultural terms. Locating rural borders is a challenge amid the two complicating factors of

globalization and postmodernism. Though the term itself might be read as implicit in meaning, there are those who would say that locating the rural on a postmodern globe is not so simple a task

Identifying “The Rural”

Identifying three major perspectives on the use of the term rural and rurality, Andy Pratt (1996) advocated theorists explore and determine their stance among them when conducting research involving *the rural*. First identified was the empiricist / rationalist perspective. The second set of perspectives is classified as idealist or materialist in nature. More recently, poststructuralist perspectives on rurality have been put forward for consideration. These three points of view are used to frame the following discussion of things rural. While this research was grounded most heavily in the idealist / materialist perspective, it also drew upon the other two in its quest to comprehend rurality.

The Empiricist / Rationalist Rural: Rural as a Landscape

From the first theoretical perspective, the empiricist or rationalist view, the term, *rural*, indicates a classification of landscapes and different social and economic practices (Pratt, 1996). The term is broadly defined by county in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), whose taxonomy includes classifications of counties as “metro” or “nonmetro.” “If a county does not have a city with 50,000 or more inhabitants, or an urbanized area with at least 100,000 inhabitants (75,000 in New England), the county is designated ‘nonmetro’” (Khatti et al., 1997, p. 80). Other authorities, such as the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), make use of continua to distinguish between “metro counties, nonmetro

counties adjacent to metro areas, and nonmetro counties not adjacent to metro areas” (Khatti et al.) In these terms, the Rural School and Community Trust follows the United States Census Bureau’s Census of Population and Census of Local Governments for the year 2000 and the NCES delineations in adopting the most conservative definition of “only open country and those communities with fewer than 2,500 people” (Beeson & Strange, 2003).

Also of the empiricist / rationalist perspective is a typology of rural school settings, which includes *stable rural* communities, *depressed rural* communities, *high growth rural* communities, *reborn rural* communities and *isolated rural* communities (Gjelten, 1982) [See Table 3.1]. The defining characteristics of these rural settings are spelled out according to the landscapes and social and economic practices which characterize the empiricist perspective of the rural.

Situated according to Gjelten’s typology [Table 3.1], the school identified for the purposes of this study was located in a community well-suited to the classification employed by the Rural School and Community Trust. Its classification in Gjelten’s (1982) typology would be *stable* in that it was seemingly “peaceful, traditional, and mostly white.” It may also reach the classification of *depressed* in that there was a great deal of economic insecurity, though the racial minority population was nowhere near moderate to high. The school district was also *isolated* by means of public transportation, commerce, and cultural activities, with a notable lack of each within its rural parameters.

Gjelten's Typology of Rural School Settings	
Stable Rural Communities	The classic rural community - prosperous, peaceful, traditional, and mostly white.
Depressed Rural Communities	Economic insecurity abounds, outmigration is high, local economy is often undeveloped, and there is a moderate to high minority population.
High Growth Rural Communities	These communities face problems inherent in rapid growth - inadequate school facilities, housing, and services coupled with problems which existed before a "boomtown" came into being.
Reborn Rural Communities	Communities attract a refugee population from the city seeking a rural lifestyle. They are converts to that lifestyle, and they are zealous defenders of many traditional rural customs and institutions.
Isolated Rural Communities	Contain many characteristics of the other types, but isolation leads to separate problems with transportation, commerce, and cultural activities.

Table 3.1: Typology of Rural School Settings (Gjelten, 1982)

The Cultural Rural: Rural as Community

The second set of perspectives on the use of the term *rural*, which is idealist or materialist in nature, “is, very broadly speaking, the ‘cultural interpretation’ of the rural” (Pratt, 1996, p. 71). Standing as an example here is Ferdinand Tonnies' (2001/1887) theory of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, by which both rural *community* and urban *society* are idealized.

Gemeinschaft / Gesellschaft the Theory

A preoccupation with the demise of community has taken its place at the center of sociological inquiry in the United States, which was taken up as “[m]odernity, urbanization, and capitalism all seemed to threaten traditional patterns of social life” (Bender, 1978, p. 3). This same trio - modernity, urbanization, and capitalism - was central to Ferdinand Tonnies’ (2001/1887) *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, with which he compared and contrasted the relationships and resultant social bonds of community (*gemeinschaft*) and those of society (*gesellschaft*). First published in 1887, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* was Tonnies’ “attempt at *new analysis of the fundamental problems of social life*” (Tonnies, 2001/1887, p. 3).

Although he identified *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as two ideal types on the same continuum, the tone of Tonnies’ (2001/1887) thesis makes clear his belief that the fundamental problems of social life to which he referred in his analysis resulted from the mass metropolitan culture of industrialization and “the psychic anonymity of advanced modernity” (Harris, 2001, p. xi). The *Gemeinschaft* of Tonnies’ theory was comprised of relationships between community members that saw “sentiment, tradition, and common bonds as governing forces” (Lyon, 1987, p. 7). Whereas community in rural areas and small towns was experienced as tightly knit “by *blood... of place...of spirit*” (Tonnies, 2001/1887, p. 27), society was lived through mechanical, impersonal, and contractual relations in more highly populated and commercialized areas. Society consisted of “little or no identification with the community, affective neutrality, legalism, and segmental conceptions of other members of the community” (Lyon, 1987, p. 7). In short, Tonnies (2001/1887) observed that people in *Gemeinschaft* “stay together in spite of everything

that separates them; in *Gesellschaft* they remain separate in spite of everything that unites them” (p. 52).

As ideals, instances of an untainted *Gemeinschaft* or an absolute *Gesellschaft* are impossibilities. This was acknowledged by the author at the time of the theory’s first publication. Rather, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* could be identified as distinct features of all societies. The boundaries demarking these two ideals do, however, seem to have been quite distinct in Tonnies’ (2001/1887) mind as the industrial revolution hit its full stride. The concepts of community and society were readily observable as it seemed possible to stand in the midst of one and look toward the other. They were geographically defined.

A seminal work in the study of community and culture, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tonnies, 2001/1887) informed the thinking of sociologists as they examined what appeared to be a shift in American culture from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. At the turn of the 20th century, this shift - from community to society - came to be viewed as the progress of modernity itself (Bender, 1978; Harris, 2001; Lyon, 1987). Here again, despite the tone of mourning in Tonnies’ original thesis, contemporary theorists are quick to point out that *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* were depicted each as an ideal means by which to organize social relationships. After falling out of fashion in the 1950s and 1960s, the late 1970s saw *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* recentered in scholarly work on community and society.

While *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* is most frequently claimed as foundational to sociological study, “there is no evidence to suggest that either in 1887 or later he saw his work as being confined within a single disciplinary sphere” (Harris, 2001, p. ix). Eclectic

in his approach, Tonnies “incorporated into his work ...questions about ‘personhood’ and ‘subjectivity’ and the impact of global capitalism...” (Harris, 2001, p. x). In short, he was concerned not only with a theory of society and a history of social change, but also with the impact of these on the social relationships that shape the individual. His was as much a cultural study as it was sociological, with *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* defining the systems of meaning with which people made sense of the world, those systems that comprise culture.

Like community and society, questions of personhood and subjectivity, then, were also geographically bound. In the contemporary era of globalization, however, questions of identity are complicated by the fact that community, society, and their resultant cultural configurations are no longer so clearly delineated one from the next. “Although previous waves of globalization have occurred, the current era is distinguished by the strength and *combination* of four elements: connection, cosmopolitanism, communication, and commodification” (Brysk, 2003, p. 22). Each of these serves to permeate the boundaries of rural culture in a post-industrial society.

Gesellschaft Gone Global

At the time of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*'s first publication (Tonnies, 2001/1887), inquiring as to the distinctions between rural communities and commercialized society might have seemed less complicated. The boundaries between the two are said to have been far more conspicuous than in the present. It is here, however, in the interpretation of rural culture, that the researcher is warned against the tendency to essentialize “the rural” (Pratt, 1996). Locating culture - those things that

define personhood and constitute the subject - becomes an epic endeavor while:

...living in an age in which national cultures and social boundaries are being radically transformed and redrawn in the face of the expanding global capitalist labor markets, shifts in the geopolitical order, and the increasingly fast-paced transnational movements of people and commodities, ideas, and media images. (Hall, 1999, p. 122)

Discussing the cultural consequences of the economic, technological, and political dimensions of globalization, Nelly Stromquist (2002) was mindful of the power dynamics implicit in the fact that globalization is “initiated by advanced industrialized countries” (p. 3). Globalization is depicted as “a process by which a given local condition or entity succeeds in traversing borders and extending its reach over the global and, in so doing, develops the capacity to designate a rival social condition or entity as local” (Stromquist, 2002, p. 3). The same holds true, it would seem, when globalization is initiated and advanced by an industrialized country within (or against) itself.

Images of traversed borders and global reach lead authors to theorize culture as permeated, multiplied, dispersed, and improvised regardless of location (Eisenhart, 2001). What effects traversed borders might have, not only on culture but also on how one might go about studying culture, has been the source of much ethnographic angst. Unlike the geographic distinctions demarking *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, globalization challenges the “belief in culture as tied to place” (Yon, 2000, p. 15). Globalization insists that the researcher focus instead on “‘cultural flows’...and the ‘deterritorialization’ of culture. In short, the dynamics to which globalization refers have changed the nature of the arena in which questions of identity, [and] culture...are being

posed” (Yon, 2000, p. 15).

The Many Rurals of the Postmodern: Rural as Identity

Along with permeated boundaries and global flows, postmodern theory further complicates theories of community and culture with talk of discursively constituted realities, bodies, subjectivities, time, and space (Cavallaro, 2001). It challenges our faith in established human assumptions to perceive the world rationally. Having explored empiricist perspectives on *the rural*, the cultural perspective illustrated by *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and the complications intrinsic to the study of culture in the current era of globalization, the third set of perspectives stems from more recent poststructuralist debates and analyses of power. It is the one that indicates “many ‘rurals’” (Pratt, 1996, p. 71). As theorists issue calls to seriously examine the ways in which the rural has been constituted for the purposes of research and theory, they caution against “using ‘taken for granted’ definitions of the rural as a starting point for investigation” (Pratt).

The contested countryside

Authors have begun to discuss a recent shift in the image of rural cultures from one of the periphery struggling to mimic their urban counterparts to one of “identity-based policies” where rural areas are valued for their local qualities rather than their “position in relation to the urban core” (Haartsen, Groote, & Huigen, 2000, p. 1). They point to the sense of overwhelm that is a consequence of globalization and the concomitant “turn towards...immediate surroundings to provide anchor and a secure and stable place. This process is often labeled ‘localisation’ in contrast to globalization and results in an increasing awareness of the specific characteristics of the local community” (Haartsen et al., 2000, p. 1). They go on to demonstrate the “complex array of power

relations, perceptions, imagery and cultural influences” among which new rural identities are being forged (McDonagh, 2002).

The *Journal of Rural Studies* editorialized that “consideration of young people is moving from an empirical and descriptive base to a series of theoretical positions, where explanations and readings of rural youth (and the context of rural “childhoods”) are more conceptually informed” (Panelli, 2002, p. 113). In response to the call for a “coherent geography of children in the countryside,” this journal conceptualized strategies for the development of rural studies concerned specifically with youth from rural areas. Among the strategies outlined was the highlighting of the negotiated lives of young people in rural areas and recognizing young people as players in the negotiation of rural knowledge(s), rural work, social relations, political arenas, space and place. Among her concluding thoughts, the editor wrote, “The ruralities in which young people live are registered at physical, social, cultural, economic and political levels and through socio-spatial contexts that differentiate individual settings while simultaneously linking these processes at wider scales” (Panelli, 2002, p. 120). Thus, rather than blank slates written passively over by their surroundings, it is argued that rural youth possess a certain agency in authoring their own lives, as well.

In keeping with the theme of multiple ruralities was a study of otherness, marginalization, and rurality (Cloe & Little, 1997). A text framed and rife with post-modern theory, this study explored challenges to the myths of the rural idyll and continued to problematize the terms of rurality. While some take such challenges as “bigotry, misogyny, abject poverty, and ignorance” (C. B. Howley, 1999, p. 35) as reason to seek their idyll elsewhere, others argue that these rural spoilers have their corollaries in

cosmopolitanism, which “might be said to have complimentary evils: idolatry, misanthropy, abject affluence, and craven expertise...the desire to escape these evils is understandable, but in truth you will find such evils everywhere. You may as well confront them where they find you” (C. B. Howley, 1999, p. 35). The postmodern rural, it seems, refuses essentialization one way or the other.

Meanwhile, Popkewitz (1998) blasted the rural term by doing away with it and its urban reference point entirely. A very interesting critical ethnography, his book provides an analysis of *Teach for America*, a teacher education program whose focus in 1990 was to recruit and train people to teach in urban and rural schools where others might be reluctant to teach. In his analysis of power at play in this training program, Popkewitz (1998) situated rural education and urban education as one and the same thing. He demonstrates his point beautifully:

What is interesting about the classification, then, is its being embedded in a discourse that functions to normalize the qualities of people who are perceived as different. Urban and rural education are words that are historically linked to specific systems of reasoning that differentiate and divide the “urban” and the “rural” child and teacher from others. The categories are the effects of power. The “others,” outside of the space of the urban and rural, need no categories or distinctions to tell of their presence. But the norms of those who are absent in the discourse of urban/rural education silently pervade the systems of classification. (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 10)

Not only did Popkewitz (1998) address issues of culture, with this he spoke directly to the question of aspirations so prevalent in the literature on rural students, which assumes,

often without definition, more and higher education as something to which rural children should quite naturally aspire.

In keeping with the silent, pervasive, powerful yet unnamed others of Popkewitz' (1998) study, other research dovetails interestingly when considering rural students who enroll at the college or university level out of high school:

In human social organization, when one's characteristics are at variance in significant ways from the modal characteristics of the social group that has achieved hegemony, one is likely to find little correspondence between the developmental supports provided by the dominant group and the developmental needs of the persons whose characteristics are different. (Gordon & Yowell, 1994, p. 51)

Learning from Popkewitz' (1998) assertions that suburban education has achieved hegemony among rural, urban, and suburban schooling in the United States, one wonders how that hegemony might play out on a college or university campus. How do the rural students perceive themselves in relation to the *authoritative self* discovered by Demerath (2002) in his study of suburban high-schoolers – the “competitive”, success determined, “brazen”, “status conscious”, “tired”, and “stressed” authoritative self? (Demerath, 2002, pp. 2-20)

Thinking Globally, Researching Locally

Hall (1999) began to make sense of the intersections of globalization and postmodernism when she wrote of the ways in which globalization contributes at once to a global cultural homogeneity and at the same time the “assertion of local ‘cultures’ and the production of hybrid cultural forms. It is these developments,” she wrote:

that lie at the heart of the postmodern condition – the historic juncture in which universal ideals conflict with particularist visions, unity is challenged by diversity, and imagined national communities are cross-cut by the politics of culture and calls to recognize collective forms of identity and difference. (Hall, 1999, p. 23)

Graeme Turner (2000), discussing postmodern theory as a means to reconnect cultural studies with the political economy in globalizing media industries, concurred when he wrote “...the processes of both globalization and localization seem to be thriving simultaneously despite their apparent contradictoriness” (p. 213).

Marshall Sahlins (1999) conceptualized this another way when he wrote, “The project is the indigenization of modernity” (p. x). Rather than suffering the loss of their cultural coherence, Sahlins (1999) contended that those less powerful simply make sense of modernity within the contexts of their own cultures, thus creating “multiple modernities” (Sahlins). In other words, rather than a determined march out of the local and into the global, it is possible that rural communities remain in tact “in spite of everything that separates them” (Tonnie, 2001/1887, p. 52). For all the backward glances issued *Gemeinschaft* in the rush to *Gesellschaft*, it is possible that society has failed to notice that modernity simply looks different in rural areas. Has the collective societal comprehension of *the rural* allowed for a modern rural? Does it allow for the possibility of *multiple ruralities*?

In the Current Era of Globalization and Postmodern Theory:

A Study in Rurality

A study in rural culture might seem misguided in a world where culture is both local and global, here and there, at once everywhere and nowhere to be found. Yet, it is

in the tension that stretches between the local and the global that this research was positioned, intent on discovering the local cultural structures which serve to constitute the rural subject *as well as* the ways in which rural subjectivities are negotiated, cast and recast amid the multiple ruralities of the postmodern.

The terms of this research are contested, but “[t]he point is that ‘we’ are *not* all nomadic or fragmented subjectivities, living in the same ‘postmodern’ universe” (Turner, 2000, p. 213). Despite the elusive definition of rural culture, its permeations, multiplicities, fragmentations, and improvisations, and in spite of theoretical postmodern figurations and literal global flows of vast knowledges, it remains that rural students come from *somewhere*...and they take their cultures with them as they go, whether physically from here to there or figuratively via electronic or other such media. Madun Sarup (1996) made the point eloquently, “I want to suggest that the concept of home seems to be tied in some way to the notion of identity - the story we tell of ourselves and which is also the story that others tell of us” (Sarup, 1996, p. 3).

Perhaps culture, rather than being quantifiable as either local or global, here in *Gemeinschaft* or there in *Gesellschaft*, is more a palimpsest of lived experience, written and re-written within contextualized systems of meaning as the global migrant moves, for instance, or the virtual realist is run down by the next global knowledge flow, or the next rural student leaves home to live in a college residence hall, one building that houses a number larger than the population of her entire hometown. Identity, then, becomes more deeply layered, each intricate fold still apparent beneath the surface, “...not only a product or set of attributes that can be claimed and neatly recorded, but more significantly, a process that is ongoing” (Yon, 2000, p. 5).

It is at one level among these layers that this research began, and at another - or a series of others - that it came to a close as I explored the educational pathways of rural students, paying particular attention to those who went to college. Tonnies' (2001/1887) theory provided a starting place within the scope of *Gemeinschaft / Gesellschaft* and his characterization of rural community being of blood, place, and spirit. While I am intrigued by Popkewitz' (1998) theorization of the *Teach for America* training program, I am not convinced, even with the advent of globalization and postmodern theory, that the rural has come to resemble the urban to the extent that they are sociologically or culturally unrecognizable on a continuum. Despite the oft predicted demise of the local, "...there is a growing disjuncture between the globalization of knowledge and the knowledge of globalization" (Appadurai, 2000, p. 4). I ventured out to the proposed research site expecting to find something rural there.

Summary

'Rural' is often defined from an outsider, urban perspective in much the same way that the dominant culture has traditionally spoken for minority groups. (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 2)

Studied from the perspective of a census, in huge aggregated data sets or smaller statistical samples, a review of the literature in Chapter 2 demonstrated that the rural educational landscape is often painted with a dreary if not hopeless cast by the outsider named in the above quote. Yet a definition of the term, rural, remains elusive in scholarly work. The preceding has not been an attempt to define rural, *per se*, but an attempt to locate this research project among current discussions of culture and rurality.

The research participants came from what might still be described as a

“community of *place*” (Tonnie, 2001/1887, p. 27). With them, I explored the impact of that place in shaping their educational pathways, their postsecondary aspirations, and the perceptions they carry of themselves as “country kids.”⁵ How might these self-definitions be clung to, negotiated, disguised, given up, and/or rearticulated as students move from one point on the *Gemeinschaft / Gesellschaft* continuum to another? How might the permeated boundaries of their local community already have had an impact on the “country kids” that they perceive themselves to be? For me, these questions made the developmental processes of identity as much a question of context as psychosocialization or cognition.

Characterizations of rural high schools as central to the social functioning of their towns raise questions of the influence of context, as well (DeYoung, 1994; Peshkin, 1978). If the school is central to the functioning of the community, it stands to reason that the students themselves are central to the functioning of the community. Not only are the means of social relating different, as in Tonnie’s (2001/1887) theory, but the student is placed *at the center* of those means. This thesis imagines what it might mean for rural students to come from the center of community, their sense of self, culture, and identity informed by all that literally revolves around them, to a place where their presence is by contract only and people are likely to “remain separate in spite of everything that unites them” (Tonnie, 2001/1887, p. 52).

⁵ This was the term used by students in a preliminary focus group discussion in the phrase that stands as the working title for this study. In an attempt to explain any apprehension they might have been feeling about leaving their hometown and rural school, students offered with a bit of a shrug, “We don’t know what to expect. We’re just a bunch of country kids!”

CHAPTER 4

STRUCTURES AND MEANING: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This research was driven by an interest in identifying the ways in which the educational choices and experiences of students from rural areas are mediated by their rural histories, how these histories remain at play in the educational pathways of those who transition to higher education from high school, and the interplay between the cultural background of college students from rural areas and identity development processes at the postsecondary level. Seeking a balance between cultural structures and the meaning made of lived experiences, fieldwork and interviews centered on more specific questions of culture and identity for students from one rural town:

- How were participants motivated (or not motivated) in this rural environment to enroll and persist in postsecondary environments?
- What were the barriers or supports to enrollment and persistence in higher education, both in the home community and the college or university setting?
- How were participants prepared to make the necessary adjustments to college or university life prior to enrollment? How did processes of adaptation continue to

take shape on campus?

Linking to student development processes, questions centered on the perceptions these students held of themselves in relation to their home community and, in turn, to the college or university setting. How did they go about fitting in...or did they?

- How did participants negotiate the transition to college or university life?
- How did their perceptions and experiences of the practices and people in their midst link to the self-definitions and sense of identity they experienced? How did these definitions change over time?
- In the end, what role did their educational experiences play in shaping any enduring sense of themselves as “rural”? How did participants adapt, resist, reconfigure the social construction of their rural subjectivities?

Epistemology

Focusing on how the self is produced and enacted in historically situated contexts, this research emitted from a cultural studies paradigm in that it was a study of cultural practices, social texts, and subjectivities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). It retained a constructivist epistemology in that “human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). Interpretive by design, this research nonetheless eschewed the notion of ethnography in the tradition of an interpreter who “stands over and against” that which she interprets (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194) ascribing rather to the hermeneutic philosophies outlined by Thomas Schwandt (2000) when he wrote, “...reaching an understanding is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing,

or tracking one's own standpoint, prejudgments, biases, or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires the engagement of one's biases" (p. 195).

Methodology

Located amid the "tension [that exists] between a humanistic cultural studies, which stresses lived experiences (meaning), and a more structural cultural studies project, which stresses the structural and material determinants (race, gender, class) and effects of experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, p. 21), this study tracked both cultural process and lived meaning. A hybrid methodology was therefore proposed which employed elements of historical narrative and phenomenology within its primarily ethnomethodological design. In its hybridity, this research took up in the tradition of cultural anthropology with participant-observation, interview, and document analysis, and was later informed by two additional types of interview, phenomenological and history narrative.

Overall Approach and Rationale

With only the slightest glimpses of occasional hope for success, a review of the literature demonstrated that rural students have thus far been conceived as generally lacking or lagging in their educational aspirations and pursuits. This was taken as indicative of the fact that the students themselves are somehow deficient and/or in need of assistance, whether because they are academically prepared to attend college but do not, could achieve higher grades once enrolled in college but do not, could make better use of college or university support systems in order to persist to degree but do not, or could have chosen a more appropriate (i.e. smaller) postsecondary setting but did not.

The research here undertook a longer term, in-depth approach to studying the

postsecondary pathways of rural high school students which had by and large been studied from a quantitative distance. From within the paradigm of cultural studies, this dissertation emphasizes that the configuration of these pathways cannot be understood apart from rural culture. Drawing the question of postsecondary pathways out from under the lens of deficit through which it is typically examined and emphasizing cultural production and identity, the inquiry became one of contexts, relationships, and processes rather than a quantified listing of factors, variables, and effects. This shift in perspective allowed for the troubling of both the rural deficit and current conceptualizations of identity development among college students. These processes had not yet been explored with specific regard to rural students in college and are not yet integrated into developmental theories about rural students in higher education.

Underlying this research was the possibility that what had thus far been theorized as lacking and lagging were in fact acts of resistance on the part of rural students to the educational structures they sensed might strip them of their rural identities, their relationships, and their community. Sensing these as the consequences of becoming a college educated person, the question was posed that what had been theorized as deficiency might rather be an exercise of agency on the part of rural students who know - or somehow intuit - that by entering “the new world” (Elliott, 1989, p. 135) of higher education they will become caught up in educational processes dominated by knowledges that devalue and are irrelevant to their lives (A. A. Howley & Howley, 2000; Popkewitz, 1998) and within which the very essence of their rural beings might be forever changed (Chu, 1980; Day-Perroots, 1992).

To guide a qualitative inquiry into the existence of these possibilities, a multi-

method, multi-sited ethnography was proposed:

Although method is what defines our specialties, it is the anthropological perspective that those outside our field relish - a perspective that sees what others often do not see, that makes connections that are not made elsewhere, that questions assumptions and exoticizes behavior that is normalized, that asks plain questions like, “What is going on around here?” (Nader, 2000, p. 609)

Casting an anthropological gaze across a rural community to inquire as to “what was going on around here?” in relation to postsecondary education was the intention of this research design. To then refocus in the college or university setting in an attempt to understand the impact of what was going on from the perspectives of rural participants sat at its center.

Design

Setting and Population

The population studied resided in a small, rural town of roughly 1000 residents located in Knox County, Ohio. The unconsolidated school housed a total of approximately 650 students K-12, and a graduating class of less than fifty in any given year (although the class of 2005 had 55 students. When I inquired as to what might account for the discrepancy over the class of just 29 students the previous year, a secretary laughingly replied, “I don’t know, cold winter / not cold winter maybe?”). The school district was classified by the Ohio Department of Education as rural poor, 99(+) percent white, evenly divided between boys and girls, and exclusively Christian.⁶

Considering community an interactional field rather than a concrete collectivity, it was

⁶ Retrieved from the world Wide Web http://ode000.ode.state.oh.us/htbin/pupil_Profile.com; October 26th 2003.

there in the town and its school that I anticipated most students would:

... meet their daily needs, and it is at least partially through the interactions which occur there that people develop a social definition of the self...Moreover, people who share a common territory inevitably interact with one another regardless of the extent to which they also participate in extra-local structures” (Luloff & Krannich, 2002, p. 17).

Through participant observation, interviews, and document analysis, I worked within the community to come in touch with its rural culture and to explore the influence of that culture on the postsecondary pathways and identities of its youth.

Sampling Strategies

Sampling for this project took place on several levels [Appendix A] . First, the selection of the school district was made. The point of access and entry into this research project was the rural school. Preliminary conversations with the principal indicated that he was amenable to my beginning my research there. Following approval from the The Ohio State University Office of Responsible Research Practices, a formal presentation was made to the Superintendent and the Principal, and then to the School Board. With these authorizations, a presentation was made to the high school teachers and students in order to gain all appropriate permissions and consents/assents.

In seeking an appropriate definition of “rural”, I borrowed from the delineations offered by Pratt (1996, discussed in Chapter 3). First, from an empiricist or rationalist perspective, the site was identified by landscape and different social and economic practices. I was interested in working with a community that was not adjacent to a metropolitan area, a community into which students were likely to have been born (rather

than imported for the purposes of industry), a community that did not contain a college of its own, and a community which did not depend upon an urban core for its livelihood. From a culturalist perspective, I sought to conduct this research with people who viewed themselves and their surroundings as rural, or as they put it, “from the country.”

Having provided a rather tidy definition of the type of community sought, I was also mindful in my exploration of perceptions and meanings which allowed for the “many rurals” (Pratt, 1996, p. 71) post-structural definition. Recognizing the permeability of rural boundaries in a globalizing world, the idea that *multiple ruralities* may exist within and outside of the same physical boundaries was important as the chosen site(s) and sample(s) were likely to provide each their own take on the topics at hand.

The sampling strategy for the phenomenological interviews was tightly linked to that of the ethnographic observation. Using sampling strategies outlined by Michael Patton (1990), the sample design was purposeful in that the small-town stood as an *extreme or deviant case sample*. The intended site was comprised of just a thousand or so people. From the selected town, those high school seniors who were planning to attend colleges or universities in the state of Ohio were approached as potential interview respondents. This approach is referred to as *intensity sampling*, which Patton points out is particularly pertinent to the heuristic nature of phenomenological interviewing as it was described by Marshall and Rossman (1999). “An intensity sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)” (Patton, 1990, p. 171). So, while the town may have been considered extreme or deviant in terms of its size, the first-year college students themselves were not

sampled due to any particularly unusual characteristic other than their plans to pursue a four-year postsecondary degree in the state of Ohio.

The sampling strategy for the life history interviews involved the identification of critical cases. Critical case sampling is recommended in those instances where resources might be limited and one seeks a site that will contribute to a deep understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990). While these interviews informed the study, they were not its central focus. Life histories were included in this research design as a sensitizing mechanism to sharpen my perceptions of the cultural and identification processes I would be investigating, to help me see more clearly those things that current students may not identify in the moment as terribly significant but which had held great meaning for others who had gone before.

Sample: Research Participants

In the high school, I observed and interviewed students from the class of 2005 both formally (in semi-structured interviews) and informally (through participation in classes and social events) focusing primarily on the 31 who had been identified as potentially interested in attending college. I spent time with and informally interviewed these and other high school students (grades 9–12) both in and out of school. Observations and interviews were also made of high school teachers and administrators during school or during school related events. I also administered a short grounded survey to the graduating class of 2005 [Appendix E].

For the phenomenological phase of the research, I conducted scheduled interviews with five graduates of the class of 2004 who were pursuing four-year baccalaureate degrees; three of whom I interviewed once and two whom I interviewed twice for a total

of 7 interviews with first-year college students. One interview took place on the college campus where the student was enrolled and the others were held in town either at the school or a local restaurant.

I collected three life histories with members of the community who had been away and completed college and then returned to the community. These were men of three different generations in the community. Each of these interviews was conducted in town, one at the school, one at a restaurant, and one in a semi-private residence for a total of 7 hours of semi-structured historical narrative data.

Meanwhile, those completing the interactional field of the rural setting informed the study as well. Through observations, interviews, and document analyses throughout the town, I came in touch with the history, the boundaries (permeable though they may have been), and the expressive practices (Foley, 1994; Holland & Lave, 2001) by which this place (and people from this place) were marked. This group included those who played a role in shaping the postsecondary pathways of high school graduates, such as family members, high school staff, business owners, and others throughout the community.

Data-Gathering

Fieldwork Procedures

An ethnographic study comprised of three distinct yet overlapping phases, this research design included the primary methods of participant-observation, interview, and document analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Establishing an understanding of life in a small, rural town was an important element of this project. Recognizing that environmental interactions tend to be the catalysts prompting developmental changes (see

for instance, Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Jones & McEwen, 2000), a sense of familiarity with the context(s) from which rural college students arrive provides some insight into the developmental issues they may face in college. To these ends, the first phase of the study consisted of ethnographic interviews, observations, and document investigation and analysis. “Wherever it has been adopted, a key assumption has been that by entering into close and relatively prolonged interaction with people...in their everyday lives, ethnographers can better understand the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of their subjects than they can by using any other approach” (Tedlock, 2000, p. 456).

Research began in the setting of a small town, where I established a research pattern of what Glesne (1999) identified as *participant as observer* on a “continuum of mostly observation to mostly participation” (p. 44). The nearly 2,000 hours of fieldwork and interviews that would be logged throughout the 18 months of research began in the high school on the day before graduation in May of 2004. Following several visits throughout the summer, I would return on the first day of school to join the class of 2005 as they made their way through their senior year. I attended classes and community events, interviewed students, teachers, and community members, and learned some of the history of the town. From the cabin I rented outside of town, I participated in everything from Friday night football games to the annual Raccoon Dinner, went to Prom and the National Honor Society Induction, and was even invited to a couple of graduation parties and a wedding as my fieldwork came to a close the following summer. This type of cultural immersion was integral to the collection of naturalistic data that was the basis for the interpretations and analysis that underlie the findings of this research. Supplementing

this phase of the study was a series of meetings with students, key school administrators, teachers, friends and family members of students who demonstrated interest in pursuing a four-year postsecondary degree.

Interview Procedures

Phenomenological Interviews. During the observation/participant phase of the study, issues of entrée and rapport were negotiated with the college-going seniors in preparation for continued communication and interviews, which comprised the second phase of the study. Grounded in the study of lived experience, this element of design provides insight into the lived meanings of a transitional event. Because I once made the transition from small town to a university setting myself, one of the advantages to building phenomenological interviewing into this research design was that it blended the experiences of the researcher with the analysis of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Here, the format proposed was an adherence to the phenomenological interview format outlined by Seidman (Seidman, 1998). A series of three, 90-minute interviews were planned, one with each participant (expected to number between 9 and 12) during the autumn, winter, and spring seasons of the participants' first year of postsecondary enrollment. During data collection, it became clear that three such interviews would be both impractical and unnecessary. Data saturation across participants was reached fairly quickly and for that reason there were just five participants in this phase of the study, two of whom I interviewed twice.

Life History Interviews. "...narrative is an epistemological category, one of the coordinates (like space and time) within which we form a knowledge of the world" and the self (Cavallaro, 2001, p. 165). A narrative genre of ethnography, life histories are

“uniquely suited to depicting the socialization of a person into a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, pp. 120-121). The postsecondary transitions under consideration might have been said to comprise just such a process. The developmental themes and patterns that emerged from conversations with community members who were currently enrolled or had previously attended college would round out the data set, providing a sense of continuity to the project from its beginnings in the town and school, to college with current graduates, and a retrospective on the developmental identity processes of higher education.

To the extent possible, and with the permission of the participants, interviews were recorded and transcribed into the data management software program, NUD*IST (NUD*IST N6 by QSR International). Field notes were also transcribed and coded into The Ethnograph (v5.08 by Qualis Research), another data management system.

Data Analysis

The interpretive act remains mysterious in both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. It is a process of bringing meaning to raw, inexpressive data that is necessary whether the researcher’s language is standard deviations and means or rich description of ordinary events. Raw data have no inherent meaning; the interpretive act brings meaning to those data and displays that meaning to the reader through the written report. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 153)

Clifford Geertz (1973) explained that ethnography is not just a simple matter of methods, but “an elaborate venture in... ‘thick description’” (p. 6). He made well the point that thick description *is* the work of ethnography. “The ethnographer ‘inscribes’ social discourse; he *writes it down*. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which

exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted” (Geertz, 1973, p. 19). To this end, any analysis of qualitative data is ultimately a textual analysis, the texts resultant of the transcription of field notes, interviews, or of historical documents already in existence.

The data analysis procedures utilized in this research were well illustrated by Marshall and Rossman (1999) and Glesne (1999). As an ethnographic study set within a particular town and school, the report of this research is intended to “take the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 159). Employing methods of historical and document analysis, interviewing, and observation, a large portion of the findings are reported as descriptive analysis.

The data texts were further analyzed first within each phase of the study, then across phases. The data from phase one, for instance, was organized and documented (listed and logged) and entered into the data management system selected for use during this project (NUD*IST or The Ethnograph). Next, began the identification of “...salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 152). Categories, themes, and patterns were noted and elements of the texts coded and sorted accordingly. The search for negative case examples ensued and emergent understandings tested and incorporated into any theoretical arguments posed for consideration. The same processes were undertaken for the phenomenological and narrative phases of the study. As a result of the foregoing, data displays were developed within each phase in the form of transcripts, code lists, and analytical maps, then cross analyzed for emergent themes, patterns, and negative case

incorporation into theoretical warrants and assertions. A continuation of the analytical process, the research report was written in such a way as to make the procedures of inductive analysis apparent and traceable throughout.

Trustworthiness

Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1989) made it clear that “one cannot expect positivist criteria to apply in any sense to constructivist studies...” (p. 236), thus leaving open the question of validity in qualitative research. In answer, they provided what are referred to as the parallel criteria of trustworthiness (parallel, that is, to positivist validity measures - internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity). The parallel criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 236-243).

Credibility. The credibility criterion was met through prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field. From April 2004 through May 2005, with the permission of the research participants, I spent a minimum of two days a week at the research site and with the primary research participants in the school and at community events as a participant observer, as well as in interviews with key school administrators, teachers, participant family members, and friends as they were willing. Engagement was further prolonged through continued contact with the most recent graduates who had enrolled in four-year postsecondary programs at colleges or universities in the state of Ohio.

Peer debriefing also contributed to credibility as I engaged, “with a disinterested peer, in extended and extensive discussions of [my] findings, conclusions, tentative analyses...” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). In fact, this process began even in the

conceptualization of this study with not just one doctoral peer from the School of Educational Policy and Leadership, but several.

Credibility is also established through the negative case analysis mentioned earlier as part of the analytical procedure of this research. This was described by Guba and Lincoln (1989) as the constant revision “of working hypotheses in the light of hindsight, with an eye toward developing and refining a given hypothesis (or set of them) until it accounts for all known cases” (p. 238). To these ends, the previously mentioned peer debriefings were also of assistance.

The process of monitoring my subjectivity as a researcher, known as *progressive subjectivity*, also began with the writing of my expectations of findings so as to guard against the privileging of my own perspective in the formulation of theory. “If the inquirer ‘finds’ only what he or she expected to find, initially, or seems to become ‘stuck’ or ‘frozen’ on some intermediate construction, credibility suffers” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 238). Again, findings were cross-checked against anticipated findings through the use of peer debriefing.

Finally, the credibility of this research was challenged through constant member checks, which Guba and Lincoln (1989) called “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 239). Carried out both formally and informally, member checks were completed and triangulated at every stage to verify verbal communications and confirm that the “constructions collected are those that have been offered by respondents” (Owens et al., 1982, p. 241). I presented analytical interpretations for negotiation with each of the stakeholders in the study along the way, and presented overall findings to those same interested parties as the study concluded.

Triangulation as a means to secure an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a) was achieved through disparate data sources as they were described above. A triangulation of methods also existed through participant observation, document analysis, and the various types of interviews utilized throughout the study. Use was made of grounded survey, too, as an additional means to confirm analytic themes and patterns with participants. Though Guba and Lincoln (1989) make less of triangulation as a credibility measure than they once did, the idea was still useful in this case, particularly as it assisted in identifying the outlying (or negative) cases.

Transferability. The criterion of transferability was established as I “set out all the working hypotheses for *this* study, and...provide an extensive and careful description of the time, the place, the context, the culture in which those hypotheses were found salient” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 241-242). As a study in time, place, context, and culture, this research as it was proposed demonstrated a solid start toward transferability. The intended thick description discussed earlier in this chapter adds to what was begun in allowing others to transfer the findings of this study to their own work and settings.

Dependability and Confirmability. Established by means of an audit, dependability and confirmability are likened to the concerns of a financial auditor, the inquiry *process* and the verifiability of the *data* (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The dependability audit interrogates the research process for its appropriateness to the task while the confirmability audit ensures that the data can be traced through the analysis and to their original sources. To ensure this criterion is met, an outside reader was sought as I neared the end of the write-up, someone thus far removed from the research process, to audit the research report for the coherence that accompanies a dependable research

process and confirmable data.

Summary

With an ethnographic research design this study sought to illuminate the cultural processes that inform the postsecondary pathways of college students from rural areas and the identity development processes of those who enroll in pursuit of a higher education after high school. This project drew from constructivist and interpretivist epistemologies and ethnographic methodologies which were cross cut with elements of phenomenology and narrative analysis. Employed first in an effort to locate culture in a rural town and then to understand how participants draw upon those systems of meaning in the establishment of identity, these methodologies provided for an investigation into the cultural structures as well as lived meanings of rurality.

Via its continuity from rural area to postsecondary enrollment in a four-year baccalaureate program and beyond, this research was intent on providing context for the developmental theory commonly employed at the college and university level. College student development is frequently theorized as if the college student's development begins upon entry to the university environment and ceases upon exit. Though often granting a nod to the significance of environmental factors and triggers, few actually include elements specific to the developmental sites of their assessment. Fewer acknowledge the continued influence of contextual elements outside the higher educational setting, such as elements of community, for instance. Identity is more often conceptualized in broad, sociocultural categories against equally broad historical backdrops.

This project centered the development of identity as a relational act, constituted

and reconstituted within specified sites (Levinson & Holland, 1996). With this research design, my hope was to learn more about the identity development processes of college students from one rural area that might be transferable to college students from other rural areas. Equally important was to provide an opportunity to reconsider developmental theory from a standpoint that identifies cultures of *place* as key elements in college student development. Restated, identity is apprehended "...not in the abstract but always in relation to a given place and time" (Sarup, 1996, p. 15).

Transcription Notes:

Interviews did not consist of interview participants speaking in the same punctuated patterns by which their statements are represented in this thesis. In adding punctuation for legibility purposes, I have made every attempt provide an accurate accounting of the feelings being communicated by the speakers. That said, unless they are bracketed such, [], the words contained within the quotations presented here were all spoken and transcribed, but the breaths that might normally be represented by a comma (,) were not necessarily a part of the original transcript. Though many remain in the representation of data, I took the liberty of deleting many *uhhs*, *umms*, and (though this is hard to believe upon reading) *likes*, as well as repeated phrases, such as *I think- I think- I think*, as the speaker was trying to gather his or her thoughts.

In reading the interview responses, it is important to keep in mind that the town where this research was carried out was characterized by its own vernacular. In fact, I had a very difficult time understanding what the students were saying during our first few

weeks of class. Participant's speech patterns were characteristic of a slow drawl, though not southern in dialect. While interview participants often use the phrases, "like" and "you know," these are not the quickly clipped phrases of young people more popularly portrayed in the media.

The interview segments presented here include the occasional transcription code which may represent the way in which a particular word was spoken or a particular pause was taken. Lest the reader believe these to be glitches in the representation of data, the following listing of transcription codes one may encounter in this text may be useful:

::: :represents the extension of a word (e.g. oh say can you see::) and sometimes appears in the middle of a word (e.g. ga::ng or scho::::l). The number of times the symbol is repeated indicates the whether the extension was long or short, though relatively so. I did not count these in time.

- - - : indicates a pause in speaking. Each mark (-) indicate approximately one second in time, therefore the number of dashes indicates the length of the pause as it was counted in time.

/ :means that the person has cut themselves off and taken a new direction mid-sentence. When the quotation immediately following begins with the same symbol, this is an indication that the first speaker was interrupted by the second.

- :when attached to the previous word (e.g. "like- I mean, like- I just really wanted to go to college), means that a person has cut themselves off, but continued in the same direction. A word such as 'this- and then this' means that the person has interrupted their thought, but continued on in the same train of thought, whereas the above (/) means they have switched gears entirely.

() :indicates voice;

[] :in the middle of a quote indicates action

= :indicates spoken at the same time

CHAPTER 5

RURAL IDENTITY IN HISTORY AND PRACTICE

My intention with this chapter is to establish in the reader's mind a picture of the cultural structures and practices that distinguish the town of Danville as rural. In so doing, I have made use of the discourses of rurality (Pratt, 1996) as they were identified in Chapter 3 as a framework for the chapter. To this end, the analysis includes a discussion of the rural landscape and continues with an interpretation of the social bonds identified by Tonnies (2001/1887) as the markers of rural community. In this discussion of the bonds of blood, place, and spirit, the work of Holland and Lave (Holland & Lave, 2001) reminds us that the components of culture – those systems of meaning with which we make sense of the world and which we acquire through processes of teaching and learning – include more than cultural structures: they include practices of identification, what Foley (1994, p. 77) called “expressive cultural practices.” In the course of the data presented here, the practices of identification with rural culture (or *country*) are demonstrated. The chapter ends with a glance at some of the poststructural influences with which Danville contends as it works within permeable boundaries to maintain its identity as a rural town.

Landscapes: An Empiricist / Rationalist Interpretation of Danville

My sense of this place was immediate even before I drove into town. I had called two days earlier to gain permission to observe at the school and the Principal had offered directions. He told me to “take route 62 east from New Albany, and when you get to the light...” he stopped and chuckled at this point, went back and repeated “...*the* light,” indicating that there was little chance of my getting lost since “*the* light” was the only one in town. Laughing, I replied, “I come from a place just like that. I know exactly which light you mean!” Like I had been told in a pilot interview, “... hometown was *little*” (interview transcript, Lucy, 02/02/02). So little you might not even know you were in a town unless the light happened to turn red as you were driving through.

As I drove the hour and a half from Columbus to Danville, I waited for that moment of country to hit me, that moment when there is no sign of anywhere else being nearby. Others might call it “rural.” If you’re from there, you call it *country*. Country hit about an hour outside of Columbus. The fields opened up, the houses grew some space in between, and I got that familiar feeling that if it wasn’t still true, it had not been long since prosperity was measured here not by how many silos you had, but whether or not you’d done well enough to have yours painted this year. Country is that feeling of miles of open space between your hometown and the next town over (field notes, 2002). [see Appendix C: Street Map of Danville].

First a settlement of the American frontier movement, Danville was founded sometime between 1813 and 1818, a collective of homesteads that would remain a farming community even as it grew into the 20th century (Feely, 1985). At the turn of the century in which Danville was established, upwards of ninety-five percent of the

United States population was rural, a term largely synonymous with farm residence at the time. Today, approximately twenty-one percent of the United States population is considered rural with just over one percent in farm residence (*Census 2000*, 2000). Danville has seen a similar but more severe decline in the number of families whose livelihood is found in farming with that number shrinking to less than one-half a percent of its population (*Ohio Quick Facts*, 2004). Even though means of subsistence are frequently sought among the labor forces of neighboring towns [Appendix B: Selected Economic Characteristics], the landscape still speaks to the farming origins of the Danville community, which continues to meet every contemporary measure of rural in the United States (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Situated among the rolling hills of northeast Knox County, Ohio, Danville has been described as "...a noteworthy example of an American village which has undergone many hardships and changes, but has managed to maintain the charm of the rural small town" (Feely, 1985, p. 6). With a land mass of slightly more than one square half mile and just 442 occupied housing units, Danville qualifies as a rural town. Its population of 1,104 is far fewer than the 2,500 required to be considered a small town (*Census 2000*, ; *Ohio Quick Facts*, 2004). It is "not adjacent to a metro area" and it is located in a "nonmetro county" (*Census 1990*). What is striking about these definitions is that they emphasize what Danville is not. With phrases like "fewer," "not adjacent," and "nonmetro," places like Danville are considered only in negative terms of contrast. Most recently, the United States Census Bureau stated simply, "Rural consists of all territory, population, and housing units located outside of UAs [urbanized areas] and UCs [urban clusters]" (*Census 2000*). In two full pages devoted to the subject characteristic

“urban/rural,” this was the only sentence devoted to characterizing rural.

In this thesis concerned with rural culture and identities, it is important to note that at no time during my research did any participant identify as “nonmetro.” Nor did they describe their home as located in a “nonmetro county” or “territory outside of UAs and UCs.” In truth, it was rare that the word rural was used by research participants. *Country* was the term of identity, both in terms of self and place. Following that, the words by which Danville was construed were *family*, *history*, and *football*, a term that held meaning far beyond the excitement of the game. In these ways, participants pointed to means other than geographic by which to interpret rural.

Blood, Place, Spirit: A Cultural Interpretation of Danville

Community by Blood:

“It’s like you’re just one big family”

The home is both the physical location and, so to speak, the living body of *kinship*. ...The spirit of kinship is certainly not limited by the walls of the house or by mere physical proximity. Wherever it is strong and lively in the most intimate relationships, it can find its own nourishment, feeding upon past memories and recalling close-knit communal activity, however far it may be from home. (Tonnie, 2001/1887, p. 28)

With these words, Ferdinand Tonnie (2001/1887) described one of the central features of rural community, family. It would be impossible to overstate the importance of family and its significance in the life of Danville or the people who live there, both which saw themselves constituted through the many iterations of this particular communal bond. As one person put it, “Well I guess the rumor is really, you know, like

you can take a handful of names out of Danville and you pretty much- everybody's related to those..." [PIII-2-1].

"The Five Families of Danville"

My first inkling of the emphasis given affiliations of family came in the form of an overheard conversation one afternoon in September. Stopping off for a bite to eat on my way home from school, I heard a woman complaining to another that one of the teachers up at the school had called her son stupid. Her indignation was obvious, "That is not right. Just because my son isn't a McAuley or a Beckett – a teacher can't do that!" She was encouraged by her listener who agreed, "He can't do that." But apparently the teacher *had* done it and only gotten away with it because her son wasn't affiliated with any of "The Five Families of Danville." [PI]

The Five Families of Danville included the Becketts, the McAuleys, the Pembertons, and the Kennedys. There were only four names in actuality, but the phrase had been uttered with the sardonic use of "finger quotes" one day when a relative of one of the senior class was telling me about life in Danville. Having grown up there, she didn't like the size of the town. It was too small and everybody was in everybody else's business. "And if you're not one of *The Five Families of Danville*," she said with dramatic emphasis, "well..." and her sentence trailed off into a shrug [PI].

The Five Families surfaced in conversations with students, too, with one recent graduate describing her experience:

...Like, when I got homecoming queen last year, high schoolers were like, 'ohh, you know, whatever, 'but some adults were kind of like, 'oh, she's not a Be::ckett; she's not a McAuley.' They didn't like that. I had a really good friend of mine [a Beckett] not talk to me 'cause her family was so upset 'cause she was on the court too and she didn't win. It was really sad. [PII-1-1]

Familial Improvisations

“*Like Family.*” Clearly there was a downside to this thing called family, but it remained the dominant organizing principle of the town. “The Five Families of Danville” and one’s relationship to them became the system of recognition by which the town and its people were known and by which they positioned themselves in relation to others in community. So important were these familial bonds that if they did not in fact exist in blood, they would be improvised. These improvisations became the practices of identification (Holland & Lave, 2001) through which the town itself was effectively situated as the fifth family. Again and again I heard the phrase, *like family*. If the townspeople weren’t actually family, they were *like family*. Evidence the young man who, when asked about his mother, father, and siblings, “Is that who you considered your family when you were growing up?”

“Yeah,” he replied, “and my best friend was always around... Mom always said he was her- he was her adopted son, so.”

This adopted son was a Kennedy.

“He graduated a year before me so yeah he- he was always around when we were younger- for a long time he lived two houses down and he- we’d just stand up on- we had these poles in our yard and we’d stand up and look to see who was- if we were home or not- like brothers and just, it stuck all the way through high school and still today, so” [PII-3-1].

Through these familial associations the people of Danville were known to one another, a feeling which was very important to the young people with whom I spoke. It

was in these relationships and through these processes of knowing and being known that they identified (and were identified) with their community, among whom they felt grounded and most at home. Following are some of the ways that the younger folks described their town:

...we're like a big family. [PI]

...for the most part this town is like my family because- I mean I'm a Kennedy, a Beckett, a Pemberton so- it's like Danville like when you hear Danville, Kennedy's a big family name. Yeah. Be::cketts, yeah, so like everybody's family here and even if they're not family it's still like- like my friends, their parents are like family to me. [PII-2-1]

... I think it's one of the very good things about Danville - - - very close knit community where if something happened 'lot of people would be there to help and even though three families mainly make up most of Danville that are all related the Becketts, Kennedys, the McAuley's and then there's the Pembertons they're not too far behind anymore, and they're mostly all Kennedys too so it's just - - - in Danville that's/ almost all of Danville is related. That's kind of cool...bein' you're always around family. [PII-3-1]

Very close knit, you know, everybody knows everybody, everybody's fairly pretty much related. I have more cousins than I know what to do with. You just wherever you turn you'll see a friendly face who you know who you love and who you've known all your life. It's just so very very ...I don't know how to describe it. I'm trying to think of the word I want. - - - It's like you're just one big family. [PII-5-1]

Making a Name. One of the most common familial improvisations was referred to as “making a name.” If one wasn’t born into the historical bloodlines of Danville, making a name for oneself was the next best thing. One way to make a name was through romantic affiliations such as marriage or dating. As one young woman put it, “...I was in pretty good ‘cause I dated a McAuley (laughs)...their family, the McAuley’s, they’re very predominant, and the Kennedys and all that. So, my name got more known as I got older” [PII-1-1].

Another way of making a name is to become somehow famous. A ready means of doing so was athletics, as in the instance of the quarterback of the football team. His mom said, “This year’s been pretty stressful. When he came home and said he was gonna be the quarterback, I wasn’t too sure. But he’s really made a name for himself in this town, you know? He’s not a Beckett or a Pemberton or a McAuley.”

“That’s not the first time I’ve heard that list of names,” I laughed.

She smiled and shrugged, “Well, yeah, you know it’s just the way it is. And he’s grown up with a good group of ‘em, a good group of kids - like there’s little Tyler [Beckett] over there [pointing across the gym where our conversation was being held during a boys basketball game] - But, you know, because he didn’t have one of those names, it always seemed like he just needed to work that much harder, you know? To prove himself, almost” [PI].

And work hard he did, producing a winning football season as quarterback, playing basketball, and doing well enough on his ACTs to make good on a track scholarship at a state university after qualifying for the state competition two years in a row. His mom planned on leaving the area after he, “her baby,” went to college, but he

would still have plenty of support there in town. His two older sisters were still there and, she said, he would probably work at her dad's farm over the summer to earn money for college.

History Comes Present through Family

History was met at every turn in Danville, often intricately bound with family, but also stored in the physical structures of the town and in the memories of the people who had grown up in and among those structures. Together with family, history became another of the mechanisms by which the Danville community was bound. Startling to me was how history came present in nearly every interaction, every observation.

One example lay in my interaction with a store owner in town. She sold athletic clothing for local sports teams and fans out of a small shop on Main Street. The shop had at one time been a barber shop and her husband the barber. He had allowed their son to set up a small t-shirt business in the basement and upon his father's passing, the barber's son and his mother had expanded the t-shirt business to the overfull athletic clothing store that it was today, the only clothing store in town. I stopped by one afternoon to buy a sweatshirt to wear to the football games and while the owner helped me pick out just the right decal, I told her a little bit about what I would be doing in town this year. She asked me where I was staying (this was usually the first question people asked when I introduced myself). I told her that I was staying in a small cabin outside of town and she replied, "The house I grew up in is at the end of that road... if you drive to the end of that road back in toward town, here, that's the house I grew up in..." [PI].

On another day I stood writing a check for groceries at the only grocery store in town. Afraid she might not accept my check, I tried to put the cashier at ease by saying,

“Don’t worry. It’s an out of town check, but you’ll be able to find me here in town if there’s a problem. I’ll be up at the school all year.”

“Oh,” she inquired, “you’re working up at the school?”

“Well, not really working. I’m doing some research at the school; spending most of my time with the seniors.”

A woman who had been standing at the end of the conveyor belt piped up, “My son’s a senior.”

“Oh? Who’s that?”

“Kenton. Kenton Lane⁷.”

“Oh, yeah! I saw you at the game last week. You had the names of your kids written on the back of your t-shirt, right?”

Nodding her head, “Yep, and that’s his sister there,” indicating the girl standing at the other cash register. With a nod toward the woman who had been helping me she said, “That’s Grandma. And that’s Great Grandpa up there,” looking toward the man behind the information desk.

At this point, another man walked in from outdoors and Kenton’s mom laughed, “And here’s an uncle!” [PI].

So much a part of the fabric of everyday life in Danville, it was that easy to connect with the history of this place and these people. I would later learn that “Great Grandpa,” had spent his life in Danville. The football archives include his image as a high school sophomore on the 1931 high school football team. He was the owner of the grocery store where we met, having entered the grocery business as a clerk in 1946 and

⁷ Pseudonym used throughout.

acquired his own store in 1979 (Feely, 1985, p. 77). This life long citizen had been fire chief of the Danville Volunteer Fire Department and Emergency Rescue Squad from 1942 to 1977 (Feely, 1985, p. 89). The department grew to serve six townships and became the Eastern Knox County Joint Fire District in 2002. Upon the acquisition of a new fire truck this past December 13th, the Mount Vernon News (January 2006) reported on the truck to be replaced, saying that the current “Fire Chief . . . recalls that his grandfather, then Fire Chief . . . , took delivery of the 1971 truck the day [he] was born – April 24th, 1971 – from the FMC Co., Tipton, Ind.”

History was always and immediately accessible. The birth of a grandson was intimately linked with the acquisition of a fire truck. The grocery store introduced four generations. A farmhouse told the story of the barber’s wife, the girl who had grown up there. Even the hardware store held history. The front part of the store had originally been a bank, founded by two Kennedy brothers in 1910 (Feely, 1985). I was given an impromptu tour of the building when I accompanied a former Danville High School teacher to purchase a couple of screws for a small home repair he was completing. “I want to show you something,” he said. He led me to what had been the safe in the bank. He recalled always being fascinated with it when he was growing up. He pointed out the handle resembling a ship captain’s wheel on the door to the safe while we peered in at the hardware supplies now stocked there [PIII-3-1]. Here again history would come present as people purchased hardware from the place their parents and grandparents had conducted some of their most private family business.

On March 16th, 2005 when Kenton’s Great Grandpa died at the age of 89, I would learn how history was also honored in Danville. The pastor presiding over the funeral

described the procession that moved slowly through town on the day of the burial. He spoke of how the townspeople had come out to pay respects by standing along the street as the motorcade, which included a fire engine, passed by. It was his impression that the town as a whole had turned out to mourn the loss of this man who had embodied so much of their history for so long.

Community of Place:

“WE ARE!! DANVILLE!! DANVILLE!! football!”

Although it is basically conditioned by living together, this kind of community can persist even while people are absent from their neighbourhood, but this is more difficult than with kinship; it has to be sustained by fixed habits of getting together and by customs regarded as sacred. (Tonnies, 2001/1887, p. 28)

Through the fixed habits and sacred customs that accompanied Danville football, I saw community enacted as the life of the Blue Devils became the life of the town itself on Friday nights. In the tradition of Bissinger’s (1990) *Friday Night Lights*, but on a much smaller scale, Danville took to the Division VI fields of the Mid-Buckeye Conference, a town, a team, and the dream of winning (Bissinger, 1990, title page). From my vantage point on the sidelines or in the stands, week after week I saw community lived. This was Danville Football.

STAND UP!!

BE PROUD!!

SHOUT YOUR NAME!!

OUT LOUD!!

WE ARE THE DEVIL:::S!!

We are the Devils!! We are the Devils!!

We! Are! The Devils!

The police officers had made their way across the football field, two from each corner standing in a small cluster in front of the grand stand from which the Danville fans were emptying. I understood their concern. We were in Ohio, after all, land of the college football riots and a Columbus Public School football season that had seen such spectator violence as to force Friday night football to Saturday afternoons in an effort to avoid the cloak of night that rendered perpetrators unidentifiable. Being from a big town like Newark, these cops might have been accustomed to trouble.

This was the second of the Regional Tournament games, and the Blue Devils had just won by a single point, 7-6. It wasn't a big win, but it was enough to gain the boys a place in the Regional Championship game next week. The officers came together in an animated group apparently trying to decide how to handle the crowd, but there were only eight of them and hundreds from Danville. As the crowd streamed past, the senior officer finally shrugged as if to say, "Well, they're not hurting anyone." There they stood, a small cluster of eight, knowing their job was to keep fans off the field, but stymied by the determination of this peaceful group to support their team. I wanted to tell them not to worry. I had been watching this scene unfold at the end of every game for weeks, now. It wasn't a riot, it was a ritual. This was just one of the ways community was performed in Danville.

I had become acquainted with this post game ritual back in September. It had been an away game, the second of the season. As the final whistle blew, I followed the crowd off the bleachers and began making my way back to my car. Halfway to the

parking lot I realized I was walking alone. Expecting to be caught up in the throng of people with whom I had just watched the game, I wondered where the others had gone. I turned to witness a community of place the likes of which I had never seen before.

The Danville fans were indeed making their way out of the stands, but they were not heading to the parking lot as I had assumed we all would. It was after ten o'clock at night. The game had been a long one, and it would be more than another hour and a half before we were back in Danville. Rather than settling in to their vehicles for the long ride home, the visitors stands, which had overflowed to standing room only for the duration of the game, were emptying onto the football field. One might expect certain parents or family members to greet the players after the game, but this group included many more than parents. Younger children dressed in their favorite players' jersey numbers ran to the end zone which the Devils had last defended. I saw mothers wheeling baby strollers onto the field with toddlers in tow. Old folks, dependant upon canes and walkers, were easing slowly through the crowd. There were men who might have been parent to a player, but there were also past players and graduates among others from the community who simply enjoyed the game. Danville was pouring onto the field of victory where their boys had just trounced their hosts, 65 – 0.

The scene took on tones of reverence as the boys ran to “take a knee” in the end zone in front of the coach. As the team completed their post game rally at the center of the field, the head coach had made his way to the goal line and stood facing the field with his staff behind him. The boys assembled on their knees in front of him and the crowd assembled in a semi-circle around them. The coach spoke, the team gave a cheer, arose from their knees, and from my vantage point at the edge of the field, I saw them begin to

make their way through the crowd that had joined them in the end zone. Expecting the team to head back to the locker room, I turned again to leave, thinking I might beat the traffic out of the parking lot. Again, I realized I was one of only a few from Danville leaving the field.

Turning back to the sideline, I wondered again what could possibly be keeping people at this late hour. The reverential tones now mingled with the social tones reminiscent of church on Sunday morning. The players greeted those they knew with hugs and handshakes. The adults shouted their hellos, clapped each other on the back, and inquired as to each others' health and families. Others, who might be seeing the newest additions to the community for the first time, cooed over infants who had been brought out into the night air to witness their first football game. No one had said it to me directly, but I was beginning to understand that this was about so much more than football.

This custom was practiced after every game, home or away. The captains ran to the center of the field as the team fanned out in a circle around them. Together they completed their team cheer, which ended with a series of jumping jacks and helmets raised in a rally around their captains. Meanwhile, the coach and his staff made their way to the end zone as the community streamed from the stands. The fans, several hundred strong and comprising a majority of the population of Danville, came and stood in a semi-circle several rows deep around the boys while the coach spoke. A cheer went up, and the mixing and mingling began. About 20 minutes later, the players began to meander off the field as the spectators made their way to their vehicles in the parking lot. The scene was mesmerizing.

I asked Coach about it one day after a faculty meeting that was held in the elementary / middle school building. Our conversation carried us down the hallway as he made his way to his first period class. Several little boys passed with greetings of, “Hi, Coach!” and “Good game!” He smiled and said hello to each and every one of them.

“So, Coach, what happens there in the end zone? What do you say?”

“I just talk about the game and what we need to improve on for next week. Usually tell them that they did a good job.”

I asked him if this was something that he had brought with him to Danville, or a tradition he had inherited from a previous coach. “Well, let’s see, I think the coach before me...well, the coach before him just took the kids into the locker room and talked to them there. The coach before me did it on the field. So, when I came, I just, we just kept it on the field. ...Yeah, I don’t know about the community. We all just go to the field to talk about the game, the kids come down, and the community, they just come. [I] just [talk to] the team...I always tell them to thank people for coming, you know, all the folks who are there, make sure they thank them for their support. But, I just talk about the game, talk about some of the things that we’ll work on in practice next week, and just tell them to thank people for being there.”

“Does the same thing happen if (though I’m told it’s unlikely) the Devils lose?”

“Well, I’m not gonna ream ’em right there in front of everybody. I’ll save that for practice. I just talk about what we need to work on for the next game.”

But about the crowd he said, “Yeah, they do that” [PI].

And so the season went:

August:

Danville 40 – Hosts 7

September:

Danville 65 – Hosts 0

Danville 49 – Hosts 7

Danville 42 – Visitors 0

Danville 68 – Visitors 20

October:

Danville 20 – Hosts 6

Danville 49 – Visitors 8

On the night of their first loss of the season, Danville 13 – Visitors 31, I was curious to see if the post game ritual would change as a result of the loss. I was interested to know if the team would stay on the field as they had these past many weeks. I wondered if the community would join them. Perhaps what I had witnessed had been only a celebratory ritual and tonight the fans would simply head for home in disappointment.

A half an hour later, when the mixing and mingling had lasted longer than it had all season, I felt silly for having questioned their motives. This was not an act of celebration. This was an act of *community*. As if in response to my skepticism, the crowd held the coaches and their boys in a semicircle that seemed a little tighter than usual. They lingered on the field a little longer. The gathering had become appropriately somber as a consequence of the loss, but there they were nonetheless: the coaches walking toward the end zone, the boys rallying around the captains, the crowd circling, and the mix and mingle taking place with spirits only slightly dampened.

Adding insult to the injury of the loss, these Visitors were the first opponents to stay on the field after the game. In addition, rather than fading into an end zone, the visiting team stayed at the center of the 50 yard line where the Devils usually fanned out for their post game cheer and rally. Their pep band stayed in the stands until the last visiting team member left the field, striking up a racket that posed no small obstacle to the Danville post game ritual.

With the public schools of Columbus as my reference point, I thought if ever there would be trouble, this would be the time. The Devils had suffered several injuries throughout the game. They were tired. Their jerseys were dirtier than I had ever seen. They attempted the fanned circle around the center of the field, only to find their victors moving to center ahead of them. Rather than a tussle over rights to the field, the Danville captains simply called their team toward their end zone, completed the post game cheer there, and dragged their tired bodies to a knee in front of their coach. It was raining. The field was muddy. The Devils had lost.

Allowing another opportunity to test my interpretations, the following week's Hosts were no more kind. Danville 0 – Hosts 20, yet onto the field the Danville community strode as the rally was held by the players at the center, knees were taken, the coach's talk delivered, and sights were set on next week's game, the one that mattered.

Against their bitter rivals of a neighboring town the Devils would prevail in their last game of the season, Danville 14 – Hosts 0. The win was particularly sweet not only because of the rivalry, but also because it sealed Danville's berth in the Regional Tournament from which they would emerge Champions. On that night, the boys received a police escort back into town, replete with several State Troopers, I was told,

who themselves were graduates of Danville High School. The season would finally come to an end when the Devils lost the state semi-final to the team that would go on to become the champions of their state division the following week. But it had been a thrilling season and Danville could not have been more proud.

Community of Spirit:

“It’s who Danville is”

The *divinity* thus evoked and worshipped by a common spirit is of major importance for maintaining the bond [of community], since it alone or for the most part is what gives the bond a living, lasting form. Such a *benevolent* spirit is not located in any one place, but dwells in the conscience of its worshippers and accompanies their wanderings in foreign parts. Those who are truly comrades in the faith, knowing one another..., will feel themselves to be united everywhere by a spiritual bond... (Tonnies, 2001/1887, p. 29)

Along with ties of family and rituals of place, Danville was a community of spirit very much according to the description offered above (Tonnies, 2001/1887). As with family, the spiritual bonds of the town were sometimes improvised, but lost none of their significance by virtue of the improvisation. Through religious faith, this third hallmark of rural community became evident.

Danville was first and foremost a Catholic town. With the arrival of the founders of the town in 1808 came the Roman Catholic tradition by which Danville continued to be characterized (Feely, 1985). I was told, “It’s a big Roman Catholic community, it’s like the oldest Roman Catholic community in the state” [PIII-2-1]. In fact, St. Luke’s parish was the second oldest Catholic community in Ohio, established on record in 1820

(Feely, 1985). As the oldest church in town, the influence of St. Luke Catholic was ever present. For example, it went without saying that there would be no after school activities (including football practice) extending past 5:00 on Wednesday evenings in order to accommodate worship services held at the Catholic Church. One student told me it was rare that students attended Wednesday night services anymore, but there was never any question that the school would not interfere with the spiritual life of the town in this way.

There were, of course, other churches in Danville. The United Methodist Church sat on Market Street across from St. Luke Catholic. There was also the Danville Baptist Church and Grace Brethren. The surrounding country roads were home to Zion Lutheran, New Harvest, and the Danville Church of Christ. Certain social distinctions were to be made between the different congregations. For instance, one recent graduate told me about a date she had had with someone from a nearby town:

I hate to like- I don't know - - - He's Baptist? But the church he went to, I know people from here that go there and said really bad things about Father... the Catholic Priest here? I was like, and he wanted me to go to church with him! I'm like, 'first thing they're gonna ask me is, 'where do you go to church?'' I'm gonna tell 'em and they'll probably be like, [disgusted].' You know, they'll probably be nice to me, but like a coldness. I hate to say that about any church, but - - - but I've got a bad impression from them. [PII-1-1]

Despite such social distinctions, very little was made of the differences between the practices of worship found in town. The pastor of the United Methodist Church described it like this:

...I mean the thing that really- I think really shaped the community to pull together religiously was when the Roman Catholics built their community center, because it truly was a community center. It was open to everybody. I mean, my-my best friend and I would go up on a Sunday night and go there and we'd play pool, we'd have dances there... [PIII-2-1]

The St. Luke Community Center, built in the 1970s, was located directly across the street from the high school. The two buildings had, in effect, become extensions of one another for the purposes of large high school and community events. School dances were still held there, as was the Annual Raccoon Dinner (which saw its sixty-first year in February of 2005) hosted by the Lion's Club, and the Medieval Dinner, which was planned and performed by the French and Spanish high school classes. The pastor, having reflected for a moment on growing up in Danville, turned to describing his life as a member of the clergy who had returned to his hometown:

Yeah, and it's like last night's service. It was open to the whole community. I- this is the second year in a row that I've had the leader part of the service, you know, it's very visible. And last Saturday I went over to the church service and just sat in a pew and participated in the worship service, not as somebody up there conducting the worship but just as a fellow worshiper. So yeah there's a lot of comfort level in- I mean to have a Roman Catholic community have Protestant ministers during Lent preach, I mean, last year when I did the service uhh - - - I asked Jim Holmes [a history teacher] – because he was a member of the Church of Christ then – if he would be the liturgist for me. So here was my history teacher from high school, who was from the Church of Christ, and myself, raised in the Church of Christ who is now a United Methodist pastor, conducting a worship service in a Roman Catholic Church and at the same time the people sitting out in the pews were from all different religious perspectives! [PIII-2-1]

It seemed that in Danville the important thing was not so much your particular Christian tradition, but that you were an observant Christian willing to cultivate the community of spirit so integral to the identity of the town. The pastor agreed:

You look for the commonality- what you have in common. And again I think it's, you know, who Danville is. You know, you find ways to do things together, to help each other, to work together to make a better community and a better school to - - - to make a better life for yourself. [PIII-2-1]

Rural Subjectivities Identified: Claiming Country

With his last comment, the pastor began to illustrate how the discourses of

rurality are employed in the demarcation of community through which Danville might be identified, and the deep-seated implications of these discourse for considerations of self and identity. People in Danville made use of these discourses in positioning themselves and others in the community and in relation to one another (Holland & Lave, 2001). It is important to keep in mind that though cultural structures may provide a certain coherency to the systems within which people make meaning, “Identities live through *practices* of identification” [italics added] (Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 29).

The data thus far demonstrate the structures of rural culture, such as family, place and spirit, as well as some of the expressive practices (Foley, 1994) employed in the identity of the town and the townspeople, such as practices of worship and rituals of place.

Subjectivities are neither simple reflexes of social position...nor simply the meaning that individuals give to these positions...identities, are formed in practice through the often collective work of evoking, improvising, appropriating, and refusing participation in practices that position the self and other. (Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 29)

Of Danville’s religious practices the pastor says, “...it’s who Danville is.” From within the discourse and practices of spirit he thus identifies: it is who *we* are. Through the discourse and practices of family the townspeople are positioned as family and they identify: *we are* family. Through the discourse of history as it was embedded in family they identify *their own* history. Through the discourse and practices of place they identify: *we are Danville*. In these ways, the culture of the town is claimed as the

identity of the individuals who make their lives there. They “develop through and around the cultural forms by which they are identified, and identify themselves, in the context of their affiliation or disaffiliation with those associated with those forms and practices” (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 1998, p. 33). The cultural structures into which the people of Danville were born (or brought) may have been put into play long ago, but they are kept at play in practices of identification and the ways in which culture is utilized in the development and expression of rural identity.

While religious faith may have been an important component of rural community as discussed by Tonnies (2001/1887), he also wrote that community of spirit means, “working together for the same end and purpose” (p. 27). The ends and purposes to which Danville made use of the discourses and discursive practices of their town were well spoken by the pastor when he said, “you find ways to do things together, to help each other, to work together to make a better community and a better school to - - - to make a better life for yourself” [PIII-2-1]. The word, *together*, is of significance because, as Tonnies’ (2001/1887) made clear, it is the relationships found among rural people – the *social bonds* – by which rural culture and rural people are identified. The students with whom I spoke talked about this as “knowing and being known.” The structures of rurality as outlined here were appropriated by the community in the production of these relationships, of the social bonds of being together, of knowing and being known. Through the discourse of family, they were known. Through the practices of place, they were known. As a community of spirit, they were known.

Indigenous Modernities: Danville in the (Post?)Modern

Compared to their outlying Amish neighbors, the Danville elucidated above

occupies an interesting point on the rural community / urban society continuum first discussed by Tonnies (2001/1887) so long ago. Over the past 30 years or so, the Amish population in and around Danville had grown considerably, leading one Danville resident to say:

...because of the Amish, too, it's a different community than it was when I was growing up...I mean, you know, it's all these small little family farms that used to be here, and now, you know - - - a lot of my classmates, their parents were farmers, but that's gone. You have a few farmers that are big and the rest are Amish, and whenever land becomes available that were small farms- I mean it's real attractive to the Amish. I mean, if you're an Amish person- you really can't be a single Amish person in the community because your labor requires other Amish people to build your barns and establish that way of life. [PIII-2-1]

The Amish, with their horse drawn buggies, modest dresses and dark suits might in likeness and in practice have resembled Danville's founding families of the early 1800s more closely than did the families presently in the Danville local school district. Though few would describe Danville as the exemplification of contemporary culture, the accoutrements of modernity were brought into stark relief in the presence of their Amish neighbors. At the same time that "connection, cosmopolitanism, communication, and commodification" (Brysk, 2003, p. 22) were said to be globalizing world economies and cultures, Danville had seen an influx of people whose lives were characterized in the strictest sense by "humility, family, community, and separation from the world" (*The Amish and the plain people*, 2006). Between these two extremes sat the modern rural of Danville.

Danville shared many of the values claimed by the Amish – the humility of faith, a close-knit family, and a community somewhat isolated from the processes of globalization taking place around them – but the cultural coherency of its modern rurality

was kept in fine balance with “the increasingly fast-paced transnational movements of people and commodities, ideas, and media images” (Hall, 1999, p. 122). In modern Danville, of course, there was electricity and there were automobiles. Almost every member of the senior class drove to school in a pick-up truck or car. (Senior class members laughed about one of their peers who lived just six houses from the school, but still drove to school each morning) The vast majority of people in the Danville school district had telephones in their homes and several students carried cell phones. The style of dress, though not ostentatious by any stretch of the imagination, was reflective of modern times: girls in low-rise jeans and t-shirts or knit tops (though the school dress code did not allow the popular midriffs or sleeveless tops) and boys in jeans and t-shirts or the occasional polo or button-down (underwear was not permitted to show above the waistband), and sweatshirts were a wardrobe staple for both boys and girls. Compared to the teen fashions I had seen on campus in Columbus, on television, and in magazines, the style of dress among the Danville students, though not the long skirts and dark suits of the Amish, was also quite modest.

Though many of the technological accessories of a globalizing nation might have been available to them, Danville did not seem to be using them for the purposes of globalizing. It seemed that they were more intent on the indigenization of these technologies (Sahlins, 1999) into what they called “country.” This was the term used by participants to represent the amalgamation of culture and practice known as identity. Through their associations with the cultural structures and practices of their community, people in Danville identified both their surroundings, “out in the country” and themselves, “we’re just a bunch of country kids” (preliminary focus group, 02/06/02)

In many ways, Danville was creating a modernity of its own by incorporating the tools of globalization into their already established modern rural culture. Automobiles, for example, were used not to travel great distances, but to travel up the street to school or to work in a town nearby (the average commute to work for people who lived in Danville was about 25 minutes (*Ohio Quick Facts*, 2004)). Cell phones were not used to maintain large global networks, but as a means to be in ever closer touch with their families and friends in town. Computers were used more as a source of home entertainment, such as video games, than a means to cast their digital subjectivities out onto the World Wide Web or into internet chat rooms. As one student put it, “Why would I use instant messaging when I can just go over to her house?” [PI]. Some students didn’t even know what instant messaging was and in one conversation a girl in the senior class needed to be brought up to speed on the Apple Corporation’s then proliferating iPod (digital music player).

Through the weekly saying on the bulletin in front of the United Methodist Church, the internet was incorporated into Danville’s discourse of spirit when in September it read, “God is always online,” a play on words reminding the people of Danville that God was always and readily accessible to them even in (or in spite of) the new digital age. Not only was God online, but apparently so was love. Computer technology had been incorporated into the discourse of family, too, when one of the high school teachers, a man of 59 who had never been married, was playing euchre online and met his (now) wife during a card game. When they married, she came from Indiana to live with him in the house where he had grown up just down the street from the Danville high school.

Summary

The modern rural is bounded not only in its landscape or its physical proximity to a metro area, but also by the culture that exists there. In an age when “it is increasingly difficult for rural residents to maintain a sense of community when so many things they depend on are located somewhere else” (Hobbs, 1994, p. 14), rural culture as it exists in history and practice is one of the few things rural communities have left by which to identify and be identified as rural. This chapter has brought to light the modern rural as it was identified through practices of family, place, and spirit in Danville, Ohio. It has also shown the deep implications of rural culture for the development of rural identity. In the modern rural of Danville, rural culture was not only the system of meaning with which they made sense of the world, but importantly, it was the system of meaning with which they made sense of themselves. That is to say, it was within this system of meaning that people in Danville developed a sense of self.

Chapter 6 focuses more specifically on the Danville High School and its role (as it was entwined with the community) in the continued production of rural culture and rural subjectivities in Danville. It explores more specifically the constitution of rurality as a core identity as that concept has been detailed in the *Model of Multiple Identity Dimensions* (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Following a discussion of *the rural gaze* (a phrase I have coined for the purposes of this analysis), the *MMDI* is incorporated into the analysis of data in an effort to understand how students experience rurality as their core self and as distinguished from other, more externally defined dimensions of identity.

CHAPTER 6

THE RURAL GAZE AND THE RURAL SELF

Following several earlier observations, I once again drove north and east to join the class of “OH-dy FIVE! OH-dy FIVE! OH-dy, OH-dy, OH-dy -y FIVE!” [PI, ‘class call’] as they began to make their way through their senior year toward graduation and all that would follow. Heading into the village proper, just past the United Methodist Church on the right, the light was strung at the intersection of Market and Rambo. A small two-story, brick school building (circa 1970s) that now housed the Superintendent and certain SEP (social and emotional problem) students sat to the left as I turned left toward the high school on West Rambo. The Catholic Church stood tall on the corner to my right, its church bells providing a holy accompaniment to the din of activity that ushered students to their classrooms across the street by the time the 8:03 tardy bell rang.

Coming up on the left behind the Superintendent’s Office was Danville High School, its corner stone having been set in 1939. Walking through the front doors was like stepping back in time. Worn marble steps led to a lobby with a few glass trophy cases strewn here and there. Looking across the lobby, there was an auditorium that for many years had served the dual purpose of gymnasium. The auditorium-style seating overlooked a platform that appeared to be a gym floor complete with basketball nets

hung at each end and framed by a heavy velvet proscenium. Standing in the doorway, I could imagine everything from prom to graduation, gym class to *Our Town*⁸ having taken place there.

This building was *old*, but polished to a shine and very well preserved. The wooden floors of the classrooms, laid in contrast to the echoing marbled hallway, were squeaky. The maps hanging on the walls appeared to be nearly as old as the building. The loud speakers were old varnished boxes with fading brown cloth screens. There was an American Flag in most every classroom and the walls were freshly painted. The fact that the clocks on the walls no longer kept time added to the impression that this might be a place where time really did stand still.

This Rural School

By its very existence the high school building in Danville symbolized the contradiction that occupies the center of ongoing debates about school and school district consolidation across the United States, particularly in rural towns. The consolidation of schools and school districts throughout the educational reform projects of the 20th century was experienced in many rural areas as an outright attack on rural life. As schools disappeared from across the countryside, the result was more often than not the gutting of rural communities (DeYoung, 1994).

On one side of these debates lay the “economy of scale,” an idea that sprang from the industrial revolution and reasoned that production (education) costs could be reduced by increasing the size of the production (school) facility (Fanning, 1995). In opposition was the unifying role of the school in the lives and livelihoods of rural towns (DeYoung,

⁸ Thornton Wilder's most renowned and most frequently performed play, a Pulitzer Prize-winning American classic first produced and published in 1938.

1994; Edmondson, 2003; Peshkin, 1978). Decisions to consolidate for the sake of economic efficiency were in direct conflict with the tenets of rural culture in which rural schools were sustained. Battles waged for rural schools were deep and divisive as rural communities struggled to maintain any sense of relevancy within national conversations of educational efficiency and emerging neoliberal policies, which “emphasize capitalistic economic principles, placing profit-making and market-based solutions as solutions for social needs and conditions” (Edmondson, 2003, p. 16). Rural communities were increasingly left behind on all counts.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the U. S. had 117,108 school districts in 1937-38, the first year for which numbers are available. During that same year, there were approximately 250,000 public schools. By 1999-2000, the number of districts had been reduced to just 14,928 and the number of schools to just 92,012. (*Anything but research based: State initiatives to consolidate schools and districts*, 2006)

In Danville I heard only the occasional whisper of consolidation and the idea was immediately dismissed with “...but that’ll never happen” [PI]. To consolidate would mean to join forces with the school of Danville’s bitter football rivals, into which the students of Danville would likely be usurped due to the fact that theirs was the smaller school district. Not only would the Blue Devils insignia be put at risk, but with it the very identity of the town. Although consolidation might seem the sensible thing in light of larger discourses of efficiency and market-based economies, few if any in Danville would not rue the day they saw it happen.

The mutual identification of rural communities and their schools is not a new

phenomenon. Schools are often referred to as primary institutions in rural communities, no less than forms of administration, emergency services, or religious organizations (*Pulling together: The rural circumstance*, 2003; Purcell & Shackelford, 2005). Even in light of the fact that these are the primary institutions through which rural economies are “directly connected to national and international markets with rural schools, health care, and other services now a part of national systems” (Schroth, Pankake, Fullwood, & Gates, 2001, p. 18), the school remains central to community life. It is a “hub of activity, the place where when the lights are out in other public settings, save for the Laundromat and the taverns, there is very likely something happening” (Peshkin, 1978, p. 147). Whether providing for social functions through activities where adults are spectators or for community activities that have little if any association to the curricular life of the students, the rural school plays an important role in the life of a town.

In the fall of 2004, Danville High School was home to grades nine through twelve, which consisted of approximately 180 students, 55 of whom were seniors. The previous year had seen the appointment of a new school building just down and across the street from the high school and which housed kindergarten through eighth grades comprised of the remaining 470 students of the local school district. There were 17 high school teachers assigned to grades nine through twelve as follows: English – 2; Social Studies – 1; Science – 2; Math – 2; Arts (instrumental and vocal music) – 2; Health and Physical Education – 1; Careers and Vocational – 4; Special Education – 2; Foreign Languages – 1. The school day began at 8:03 sharp and the final bell rang at 3:10pm. In the mean time, there were six periods (including lunch) and an eleven-minute advisory period during which announcements were made over the loud speaker.

From August through December, the bulk of my classroom observations were made on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during first period Anatomy (and occasionally Senior Projects), second period Advanced Math, and fifth period AP (Advanced Placement) English. These were the classes that had been identified to me as those in which college-going seniors would likely be enrolled. During the spring grading periods, January through May, that list included first period Senior Projects or English 12, second period Physics (and occasionally Biology II), and fifth period Calculus. I rotated between senior advisory and activity periods, which were unstructured (though still in the classroom) interludes that occupied the middle of the school day from 10:53 to 11:48 and were followed by lunch, for which students had 26 minutes before heading back to class by 12:20.

The life of Danville High School and the life of the town were so entwined as to be virtually indiscernible one from the other. To speak of the school is to speak of the town. This became clear to me when I asked a group of seniors at the beginning of the year what they thought I should pay attention to while I was there doing my research and they provided a list of events that involved the community and the school in equal parts. I asked, "Now, if I spend the year here, trying to figure out what it's like to be you, what are the things you would recommend that I just can't miss? Like, I would just totally/"

"The Devil-Dog game," came the immediate reply, referring to the football game between the Danville Blue Devils and the Bull Dogs from their rivaling school. So important was this event, the student had interrupted my question to ensure its placement on my list of priorities.

"What's that?" I asked.

The girl replied, “The Devil-Dog game. The last game,” and the group proceeded to tell me about the football game and the location of the school where it would be played this year. They also explained that the game had been moved from Friday to Saturday night because of the number of people drawn to watch this make-or-break affair (discussed in Chapter 5).

“Graduation,” another student said. I had observed graduation ceremonies for the class of 2004 the previous May, and noted that the town appeared to have been in attendance in its entirety as I counted the number of people in and around the gym that night (not the auditorium described above, but the facility that was locally referred to as “the new gym,” which had been added on to the school sometime in the 1970s).

One of the boys said, “I think, prom. Like, it’s *important* - - - around here... We have a Grand March. Like, the way our prom is set up, there’s a dinner- we’re served dinner. The School Board is there, the Superintendent, the Principal are there- then after dinner, before the dance starts, we have a Grand March. Like all the parents and friends, family and everything- it’s like a big parade and like, you walk out with your date...” The other students joined in at this point to describe the evening that I would have the chance to witness nine months later.

The junior class (in accordance with tradition) planned the senior prom and both classes were in attendance at the small country club that had been chosen as this year’s venue. While dinner was served, people from Danville gathered outside to catch a glimpse and take pictures as each senior class member was announced after dinner. The students stepped out onto the veranda as their name was called, moved to the ‘X’ taped at the top of the steps, stood for a moment to have their picture made, then proceeded down

the steps toward the crowd below and around the corner to the right, arriving again at the main entrance to *“A Night In Paradise (DHS prom theme, 2005).* The setting was beautiful overlooking the 9-hole golf course on one side and the tree lined country road we had all followed to get there winding off in the other direction. The crowd was not as big as the crowds at the football games, but the event was no less important, with parents, grandparents, graduates from the previous year, and youngsters all coming out to be a part of the festivities. Following the Grand March, the juniors and seniors went back inside to dance and the crowd outside slowly dispersed.

“Have you ever heard of the Raccoon Dinner?”

This question caught me off guard, “Raccoon dinner?”

“It’s a dinner we have every year, here in Danville. My Grandpa [pronounced in the local dialect “gran-pa:w”] is a big provider of that.”

Still not quite sure what to make of this contribution to the list of things I shouldn’t miss, I asked, “So is this a town thing, or your grandfather’s thing?”

“It’s a town thing. It’s been goin’ on for fifty-plus years. Yeah, people come from all around. It’s good.”

“Of course,” I thought to myself later, “it’s how this place is known, ‘People come from all around.’”

“And, where is it held?”

“Over at the [St. Luke] Community Center across the street,” the inside of which I would see more than once that year as I participated not only in the Raccoon Dinner, but other events where the differences between the community and the school were so subtle as to be imperceptible.

Knowing and Being Known

The entwining of the high school with the Danville community was instrumental to the continued production of the rural culture that existed there. Through events such as those described above, the cultural structures of family, place, and spirit as they were brought to light in Chapter 5 were incorporated into the lives of students in the school. With the town watching, the students meted out their rural subjectivities amid the discourses available to them.

As students introduced themselves to me, they would frequently identify as members of the families to which they belonged, pointing out cousins with whom they were currently attending classes or brothers and sisters who had graduated from the high school or were currently members of the younger classes. In the class of 2005, the Becketts, the Kennedys, and the Pembertons were well represented, with two delivering the valedictory and salutatory speeches to their class on graduation night. In one of my initial visits to the school, one student said, with much agreement from around the group, “Some of these teachers taught our parents” (preliminary focus group, 02/06/02), adding yet another layer to the ties of family in this community. Still another student described for me what it had been like to be taught and coached by his brother, who had been a teacher at the school for a period of time while he was in attendance [PII-3-1]. His mother was also on the Danville faculty. The school was not a separate system into which students stepped as a reprieve from the community that they would then reenter at the end of the school day, and expressive practices of place often came through the school, such as the football rituals described in the previous chapter and the high school prom described above.

Expressions of spirit were also structured into school activities, both in terms of religious beliefs and the ends and purposes to which this rural culture was geared. There was the scheduling of school events around the religious observances of Wednesday evenings as well as the presence of a student group known as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. There were usually prayers offered at the beginning of school and community events such as football games, graduation, and the Medieval Dinner, which was another of the school events held at the Community Center.

As for the ends and purposes of these cultural practices, they were very much geared toward what the students discussed as “being known.” This was important to them. This familiarity ran deep among the young people of Danville, providing a sense of security about who they were as people and bringing a sense of social significance to their every activity. Student activities acquired significance because they would be and always were ensconced within the gaze of the town, this place where they were known. Even something as simple as walking home from school would be witnessed.

To illustrate the point, I spoke one day with a group of students about their feelings of safety in Danville. We were talking about being out after dark once daylight savings time came in the fall. I asked, “What about walking around at night?” There was general agreement that the students felt safe being out at night, with one girl saying, “There’s always somebody out there looking out the window anyways.” They were always held in the gaze of the community. Someone was always watching, whether at a traditional community/school event or the everyday practice of walking home from one. Their activities achieved social significance by means of the *rural gaze*.

The Rural Gaze:

“These are good kids”

The gaze, as portrayed in critical theory, denotes a relationship of power between the one looking and the one looked upon (Cavallaro, 2001). Foucault contended that it was impossible to separate practices of power from the notion of gaze and further asserted that gaze had been transformed in modern societies to *surveillance* (Foucault, 1991a). He argued that “the disintegration of the feudal/agrarian setup produces free-floating subjects, no longer anchored to traditional notions of community and identity” (Cavallaro, 2001, p. 133) and surveillance was a means of apprehending the free-floating subject through visual control. The power of gaze was at work in Danville, though it took on softer tones in the modern rural of this town. Gaze, as it existed here, was utilized for the very purposes of maintaining some of the traditional notions of community and identity, which Foucault argued were no longer relevant. In that it was appropriated in the (co)production of rural subjectivities, I refer to this less imposing means of surveillance as a rural gaze. This rural gaze, unlike Foucault’s surveillance, was distinctly tied to place in the production of rurality.

As an example of how the gaze came into effect, I had been assured during a preliminary conversation with the superintendent and the principal that I had chosen the perfect site for my research because of the quality of the town and the quality of their students. “These are good kids,” they said. This was a phrase that would be repeated many times throughout the year. On this day, the two school administrators told of having attended meetings with other school administrators from across the state and they described to me the shock of the others when they learned that high school students in

Danville were not monitored by school personnel during their walk to lunch, which was served in the cafeteria of the new school building down the street. The other administrators found it hard to believe that Danville did not lose their students to truancy along the way of this daily walk.

The same held true for football practice. In Danville, the football field was at the end of town opposite the school. I was told this would be cause for alarm in many school districts, but here the players simply suited up for practice and walked or drove down to the field after school. The principal, a retiree of Cleveland Public Schools, was often just as amazed as his colleagues when he was telling me these stories. He would begin and end by saying, “You know, these are just good kids.” My observations throughout the year proved in agreement, with the notion of the rural gaze providing assurance.

The reason that school personnel were not needed to monitor the comings and goings of high school students at lunch was because the students would be, and always were, held within the gaze of the town. As the student above (p. 123) had said, “There’s always somebody out there...” If they were truant, someone would know. In this case, the man who sat on his porch to whom I often waved on my way back and forth between the two buildings would know. Certainly, in classes that ranged in size from three to fourteen, someone would notice the missing among those who returned from lunch. As the year wore on, I, an outsider, without noticing that I was doing so, began to notice when students were not where they should be during the school day. I had, in effect, adopted as my own the gaze as it was practiced in this community.

On Being Known:

“Could be bad, could be good”

With attachments to modernity and industrialization as elaborated by Foucault (Foucault, 1991a), the rural gaze, as with the modern rural of Danville, was often at odds with itself in its placement on the rural community / urban society continuum. It functioned as the other edge of the cultural sword called “knowing and being known.” While students in Danville took solace in being identified and identifying with the rural culture of which they were a part, the regulatory effects of the rural gaze provided for a certain discomfort when they strayed from the “good kids” they were intended to be. All of the interview respondents spoke to the doubled edge of knowing and being known, with one echoing the principal above, “...because, you know, when we were growing up we were taught, just, how to be good I guess” [PII-5-1]. Following are the comments of this student’s classmates with regard to the rural gaze as a function of knowing and being known:

...it was good. I’m glad I graduated from here. Like, when I tell people, ‘ohh, I had 29 people in my graduating class,’ they’re like, ‘Are you serious?’ I’m like, ‘yeah!’ I’m just like, ‘everybody- we *all* know each other,’ which can be bad, but...I can say I *really know* everybody in my graduating class. ... I just loved how everyone knew each other and we were really close. [PII-1-1]

This closeness and the fact that she “really knew” her classmates provided a sense of assurance about herself as a member of the Danville community. As she continued, this student pointed to the conflation of the school and the community in monitoring the events of her life and her self:

...It’s good; bu::t then there’s things. I love all my friends and stuff, but people like to talk in Danville. Like, I think one of the bad aspects- Danville, like, when they find something, if someone does something wrong, they latch onto it and it

just spreads like fire through the school. It's HORRIBLE. Horrible...

...I had something happen my sophomore year and I remember people- all the teachers having discussions about it in class... Usually they know more than what we would want them to know...but the teachers really get involved, and the parents that have kids here, then they talk all about it. I walk into the bank, like- there'd be situations going on in my family- someone's like 'Ohh so-and-so blah blah blah' and I'm like, 'How do YOU know (laughs)? You don't even have kids in this school anymore!' She's like, 'we:::ll...' you know. I'm like, 'sshhhs-' you know? It's the BANK. I don't know; it's crazy. [PII-1-1]

Her classmate echoed with this:

It's a good thing in a way, you do know everybody, but in another way it isn't because you know everybody's past. I mean, like, sometimes people don't let things go and just can't - - - it's hard - - - like if you go to a big school you'll have say maybe ten or a handful of friends or whatever that you *really* know, but if you're at Danville you have a lot of friends who you really know and who you're close to. But, like if you were at bigger school, I mean, you don't always know everything about everybody, so then again I mean, just depends on how you look at it. [Danville's] a town where you say something at Dave's Place, the top of town...everybody will all know about it before like 15 minutes have passed. It will be all through town... I mean, say people do bad things, I mean you know about it, then everybody knows about it, and then everybody's like, 'oh that/ labels that person.' So I mean, could be bad could be good. [PII-4-1]

Again, the above student expressed the importance of "really knowing" his classmates, but pointed to the perils of the rural gaze as it related to "knowing everything about everybody." Another classmate added:

Like everybody knows everybody and for the most part everybody's friends. Like, my class, for the most part, we all got along. Like when I tell people at [college] like, 'there's 29 people in my class,' they make fun of me, but it's like, I knew them and I knew them well. We were really good friends so- I don't know it's hard to explain to somebody that comes from a big school...

...it's a small community...it's so different than any other place I've ever been...just because the people are so:: - - like supportive and always there for anything. Like whether somebody's dying or somebody's getting married, they're always there supporting you... They're just caring and like I said always there... [PII-2-1]

What the students were describing was unlike the system of thought associated

with the “free floating subject” (Cavallaro, 2001, p. 133) of the postmodern where “individual selves, are alone with their needs in a world consisting of objects, some of which can satisfy the needs. No one else is there” (Douglas & Ney, 1998, p. 9). In Danville, someone was “always there.” Still, of the rural gaze this student added, “...on the other hand, if like something is bad happening in your life, everyone knows about it.”

In the following comments, the student speaks to the ways one’s actions take on social significance in light of the rural gaze:

...People in Danville don’t normally judge - well actually I can’t say that. They judge pretty bad, but they don’t/ once they get to know you, then it’s a pretty good place to be so...

...my junior year [a classmate] and I got in a fight in the cafeteria and it was going around town ‘n stuff that [we] got in a fight and stuff...they just/ they judge you upon actions and stuff. Like/ if/ my friend..., he dated a freshman, he was a senior that was/ that was very judged upon. They judge people’s actions, they don’t really judge people, they judge what they do and if something were to happen ‘n stuff they’re always/ there’s always someone in Danville that’s going to support you. [PII-3-1]

The fact that they “*really knew*” each other was consistently named the source from which these students received support, caring, and, in effect, self assurance from their community. By virtue of the rural gaze, they came to understand the value of “good kids” in their community, for to step out of line could be, as the first speaker above said, “HORRIBLE.” Despite the discomfort experienced upon having done so, however, the rural gaze, like knowing and being known, brought significance to the activities of the students in its communication to them that they were noticed, recognized, and known – good or bad.

NKP

There was one group of young people in Danville that had stepped so far out of line as to be unrecoverable by the community. They called themselves NKP.

“That’s Danville’s *ga::ng*.” The word, gang, was always stretched and put in finger quotes of mockery by almost everyone who mentioned this group to me.

With much laughter from the group, a boy said, “It consists of four people.”

I asked, “What’s the name of the gang? N. K. P.? What does that stand for?”

“Niggers Keep Peace.”

“Niggers. Keep. Peace,” I repeated.

To the amusement of his friends the speaker added, “They’re white guys.”

The teacher spoke up, “They’re mostly made up of the students that go over to the Alternate School, and it’s not/”

“/Or dropouts,” one student furthered.

“It’s not, it’s not a gang, *per se*, like - - - *ga::ng*,” the teacher continued.

“Yeah. They steal car batteries. That’s pretty much what they do,” one girl said.

“Yeah, and money from churches,” her friend added.

“And drink the wine,” another chimed in.

While I heard about NKP from several different interview respondents throughout the year, I had only one occasion to observe a member of Danville’s gang. It was during a football game that I noticed a boy of about 16 years of age standing at the lower left hand corner of the grand stand. I didn’t recognize him from school and he was dressed differently than the typical Danville High School student. He wore a knit cap pulled down nearly over his eyes, intentionally baggy jeans, a hooded zippered sweatshirt, and a

certain attitude that anyone watching Music Television (MTV) might have recognized from some of the urban Rap videos currently being shown. He stood out from the crowd as he postured to the rhythm of the cheerleading routine taking place there in front of him. After a couple of minutes of having entertained himself thus, he poked his cigarette into his mouth and sauntered toward the other end of the bleachers.

Smoking was not allowed in the Danville football stadium, and this young gang member was met with the full force of the rural gaze as he reached the mid-way point of his journey there in front of the grand stand. The rural gaze was quite literally trained on him as one of the students sitting in the crowd spoke to him about the cigarette. Without a word this would-be gangster sheepishly dropped the smoke and snuffed it with his sneaker as he continued on to the other end of the bleachers and the rural gaze turned back to the matter at hand. Their gaze might not have been able to keep him out of jail or the Alternate School, but for the duration of this football game he would behave as the young rural man they knew him to be.

“We’re just a bunch of country kids”

In Light of the Rural Gaze

The *Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI)* [Figure 2.1, p. 130] (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 409) consists of three basic features. First, there is the core sense of self, “experienced as a personal identity, somewhat protected from view, which incorporates ‘valued personal attributes and characteristics’ (Jones, 1997, p. 383)” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408). The second feature of the *MMDI* is a series of intersecting circles that “represent the significant identity dimensions and contextual influences identified by participants” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 409). The identity dimensions of

race, sexual orientation, gender, class, culture, and religion are represented by dots that travel along the intersecting circles depending on the salience of that particular dimension to the core in any given context or at any particular moment: the closer the dot to the core, the greater the salience of the identity dimension at that point and time.

Represented by the larger circle within which the other features of the *MMDI* exist is the “context within which the individual experiences multiple dimensions of identity...”

(Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). This includes family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, and life planning.

The analysis of data thus far presented begins to elaborate the theory of the *MMDI* (Jones & McEwen, 2000) by demonstrating how the context – in this case rural – can be experienced as one’s core identity. Participants in this study not only considered country their surroundings, but also themselves and each other. As a group of seniors had said during my first visit to Danville, “We’re just a bunch of country kids” (pilot, focus group, 02/06/02). The structural elements of rural culture, which from an empiricist perspective would typically be considered part of the larger context, became a set of internalized cultural logics by which rural subjectivities were fashioned in Danville. As articulated in Chapter 5 and here in this discussion of knowing and being known, country was *who they were*. Unlike the identity dimensions of the *MMDI* whose salience is experienced as difference from others, this core identity was affirmed as their being a part of others. This rural identity did not become less salient or slide away from their core when participants found themselves in a different context. It was at their core.

I encountered two particularly illustrative examples of this where students not only identified with Danville, they were identified *as* Danville. In the first, a historical

interview respondent laughed about the small state university he had attended after high school:

...I mean, they *called* me Danville. That was my name, you know...when I ordered pizzas I'd say, 'Danville,' and they'd say, 'How do you spell that,' and I'd say, 'D-A-N-V-I-L-L-E.' They thought my first name was Dan and my last name was Ville (laughing) yeah, yeah, yeah... [PIII-2-1]

This experience was echoed some 30 years later by one of the 2004 graduates who said:

Yeah I helped out/ My brother teaches at Mt. Vernon, now, he coaches baseball at Mount Vernon and I helped him last year when I wasn't doing anything. Yeah and I was always called Danville. ...never call me by my real name, just always Danville... [PII-3-1]

The characteristics and features of their rural town were so much a part of their identity that they were recognized even outside its geographic boundaries. They carried their rural identity with them.

Bringing Danville to the Core

I asked the above young graduate what the word identity meant to him. Like the participants from whose responses the *MMDI* was developed (Jones & McEwen, 2000), he made a distinction between his personal identity and his social identity when he said identity is:

Who you are, or *what* you are is more what I think identity is and umm ...people identify you by things you...do and or what you don't do...I guess you have your personal identity where how you see yourself, but mainly it's how people see you I believe is identity. [PII-3-1]

As with the entwining of the school and the community discussed earlier in this chapter, the differences between what Jones and McEwen (2000) described as “inside self” and “outside identity” (p. 411) were subtle, at best. While the distinction of a personal identity was made, there was a conflation of identity layers based upon what this student

called, “things you do or what you don’t do.” This was “mainly” what identity meant to him. This again points to the social significance of students’ activities and practices of identification as measured within the rural gaze. When I asked, “What is it made up of? Where do you draw your identity from?” He replied after a moment’s thought, “- - - being from Danville.”

While other respondents were not quite so specific as to name Danville when they discussed what identity meant to them, it was easy to see the elements of rural culture – the systems of meaning with which they made sense of the world – sitting close to the core of who they believed themselves to be:

- - - how you were raised and stuff has a lot to do with your identity...I think identity has a lot to [do] with like - - - BEING - - - - Like, if someone really wanted to get to know me, I would- or I wanted them to get to know me, I would tell them about stuff with family, like my past. [PII-1-1]

The next respondent made the personal/social distinction when she said identity is “...who you are and how people perceive you...your personality *and* what you do,” but she added the discourse of spirit to her core sense of self when she said that in order to really understand her identity, one would have to understand:

- - - - like my morals and what I care about, my family and God and my friends – my old friends plus making new friends and like I said before staying involved in Church... [PII-2-1]

All of these, she drew from Danville.

Another recent graduate also brought Danville to his core sense of self with this:

Your background...That’s how you identify a person, I’d say. Well, say like me coming from a small school, small city, that’s my background in a way and that/ I’m sure I’m a lot a different than a person from a big city ‘cause I can trust people more and say I went to a big city [to college], I’d probably trust a lot more people than I should... [PII-4-1]

This student was not the only person from Danville to bring up the idea of trust as a core identity characteristic. As another man was describing his transition to college from Danville, he said:

I think probably one of the positive things is that the kids here in Danville develop close knit relationships...we're a little more trusting. We're a little more easy to like just walk up and start to have conversations with people. There's a lot stronger trust level I think, kids coming out of Danville versus kids coming out of a big high school situation where everybody could be a threat. [PI]

This identification of themselves as trusting seemed to be a function of knowing and being known and the rural gaze as they were discussed above. While the rural gaze had certain discomfiting effects on their behavior, there was safety to be found within it, for it held not only students but anyone who might intend them harm. The fact that there was "...always somebody out there..." (above, p. 123) meant that their core sense of self was developed without the hindrance of fear. This was evidenced by the fact that many families did not lock the doors to their homes or cars in town and, as my pilot interview respondent had said of her hometown, "...I had never *been* in a dangerous situation. I never had been. You could walk around, you could sleep on the front lawn in [my hometown] for god's sakes and no one was gonna bother you" (interview transcript, Lucy, 02/02/02). The same held true in Danville, because the rural gaze would keep them safe.

Another example of how the rural gaze functioned to develop trusting subjectivities came through the fact that none of the students locked their lockers at school. The principal, who was in his third year at Danville, told me that he had been insistent that each student have a lock for their hall locker during his first year there. Nobody used them. Taking note, the principal decided the following year to announce

that any student who wanted a lock for their locker could come to the main office to sign one out. No one came. By the time I arrived, he had given up completely.

Unfortunately, that same year, some items were stolen out of a couple of student lockers. Rather than institute a policy that everyone need lock their lockers, the students were intent on finding the person who had done the stealing to ensure that it would not happen again. It never occurred to them to assume by virtue of one person's transgression that their community might no longer be safe.

The trusting self came in part through the collective history of Danville. Theirs was a very personal history in which the relationships shared among students were far more important than anything they might steal from one another. Another student spoke to this sense of history in our discussion about what identity meant to her. I asked, "Is physical appearance a part of it?" She replied:

Oh, yeah, but I don't think it's like the most important part. Obviously [there's] your physical appearance, but I think if you really know a person and you're explaining them, you're going to use more than just brown hair, blue eyes, weight, height. I think that's more important anyway, that you really know a person and what they're about... 'cause you know here [in Danville] you've known everyone since you were born and you get to know things about them and who they are... [PII-5-2]

Again, in Danville they know "who they are." If there were a momentary lapse, there would always be someone there to assure them.

Social Identity Dimensions in Danville

While rurality was interpreted as "tell[ing] the central story of all the participants" of this study (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408), it continued to function also as the context within and around which these rural students constructed the more externally defined dimensions of identity, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic

status, or class. Because of the interactive nature of these social identity dimensions with the core identity of rurality, what follows is an articulation of how two of these multiple identity dimensions became more or less salient in Danville given the environmental influences of their surroundings (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 411).

Racing Rurality

There are very easy prejudices that are small-town. They're like *community common knowledge*, not even seen as prejudices, like there's nothing even wrong with it. But there *IS*, and the only reason I know that is because I've lived someplace else where if you said that to certain people they would probably be very upset with you. (interview transcript, Lucy, 02/02/02)

In concert with the above observation, one interview respondent said of Danville:

I think it's starting to change a little bit, but like, the older kids - - - Like, the older people, they're proud to be like racist and stuff...[but] people like- I'm like, 'If you did that anywhere else, they'd probably shoot you down'" [PII-1-1].

Another young woman put it succinctly when she said, "Like, I mean, I'm proud of where I come from, but...hicks and hillbillies are just racist, you know" [PII-5-2]?

The crux of the racial identity matter came to the fore in Danville when the "hick or hillbilly" of whom they spoke was, in fact, a person of color.

I was told by a group of senior class members, "We're not exposed to a lot."

To which her friend added, "Yeah, we're sheltered."

Another student emphasized, "Yeah, we're *very* sheltered."

One student confided, "We're not exposed to very many races... We're mainly all Caucasian."

"Yeah, I saw in the stats for the school that you're like 99.9 percent white, right?"

The group offered general affirmation of the statistic and a girl said, "We just have one kid."

Another girl corrected, “Two.”

“Right, we have two. One in our class”

“Isn’t he the first one to graduate?” another student asked.

“One what?” I asked

“African American,” came the response.

“Oh. And he’s the first to ever graduate Danville?”

“Is he *really?*,” came the incredulous query from another student.

Of the boy who had originally brought it up I asked, “So, why do you mention race?”

He answered, “Just for the general fact that when you’re around other people, it’s weird ‘cuz you’re not used to bein’ around other races.”

“Are you in situations where that happens now? Or is that something that you anticipate happening later?”

One student said, “Definitely in college.”

And the boy continued, “Like, now, playin’ sports or like goin’ to Cedar Point [an amusement park] or on vacation or something...”

In Danville, where 99.9% of the townspeople were white, Jay⁹ was not white. He was biracial – half Black and half white – and in appearance would be seen as Black before white by most anyone glancing his way. Jay was a young man of color living on the racial margin of a very white place. As an expression of his racial identity, Jay’s hair became the focal point of much discussion throughout the year.

The first time I thought about Jay’s hair was when the principal mentioned it to

⁹ Pseudonym used throughout.

me. It was early in the school year, before I had met Jay, when the principal told me about this kid who had been called into the office that day because he had not been attending his fifth period class. In response, Jay told the principal that he had not been attending class because the other boys had been calling him names and using racial slurs. The principal saw this as Jay “playing the race card” in an effort to shirk his scholastic responsibilities, and told me in no uncertain terms that he was not happy about Jay’s having done so.

When I walked into fifth period the next day, the principal was leaning in the doorway from an adjacent room saying, “I want to see all the senior boys right now.” In unison, the 12-or-so boys pushed back their chairs and stood. They followed the principal into the next room and the door closed behind them. This image came back in stark relief as one of the senior boys later protested to me, “Well, it’s not like we’re the KKK or anything...” In my mind’s eye I saw them again, a bunch of big mid-western white boys, draped identically (except for the numbers) in their white football jerseys, pushing back from the table with authority, standing together, and walking out of the room.

What I didn’t know is that Jay was already in the room adjacent. It is difficult for me to imagine what he might have been feeling as the other boys filed in, because what I also didn’t know is that the principal had held a meeting earlier that day with those same boys during which he had indicated (in not so many words) that the point of the fifth-period meeting would be to “call Jay’s bluff” by giving him the opportunity to face them, the white boys against whom his allegations had been made. What the principal would tell me later is that he had been further upset that day because Jay had come to school

with his hair in tiny little braids that stuck straight out from his head. The principal said, "...and I think that's why he changed his hair today, so he could look *more Black!*" The idea was nothing less than infuriating to him. This was in September.

In December, I happened to be the first person at school to see Jay upon his return from a trip to California. The center where he was a culinary student had taken a group of students to the West coast for the week. Jay had just been dropped off as I was leaving the school board meeting across the street and we ran into each other making our way to the boys' basketball game already in progress in the high school gym. I said, "That is some FUN HAIR! Where'd you get that hair?"

Clearly enjoying the attention, he told me that he had just been to California where he had gotten a "really great deal" on the braids that now adorned his head and he had worn them "...ALL WEEK. I got them the first day we were there!"

Now, these were not just any braids. These were long-to-the-middle-of-his-back-with-golden-highlights braids, and they had body. This was some gorgeous hair that had to have cost him a pretty penny even at a great price. I complimented him again, we made our way inside, and he took a place among his classmates in the bleachers, where I noticed the girls around him reaching out to touch and fawn over his hair.

I ran into Jay less than twelve hours later as he signed in at the principal's office the next morning. Struck with a kind of horror, I exclaimed, "Jay! What happened to your hair?!"

"I had to," he said, and continued to sign in.

I noticed where each of the braids had been snipped at the nape of his neck and said, "That was some great hair and it looked great on you. Why did you cut it off?"

“I would be eaten alive,” he voiced in confidential tones. “They would just eat me alive.” Confidential because we were standing in the principal’s office, after all, in a school that was built in 1939 through which voices carried and echoed without effort down the marbled hallways. Having already witnessed his “bluff” being called once this year, I believed what he said.

From January through his graduation in May, Jay went natural with an afro that stood in a halo of six or seven inches about his head, a constant vex to the principal who continued to make his disapproval known. A teacher tried to ease the effect of the racist name calling by telling me, “They don’t mean anything by it. They only call him that when he’s being a pain in the ass.”

To which I responded, “Do they call each other that when they’re being pains in the ass?”

“Well, no,” said the teacher.

In considering the analysis of these data, I imagined some satisfaction in dragging out the evidence of racism I had witnessed, labeling it thus, codifying its effects, and calling it a day. Nevertheless, to announce that I had discovered racism in a rural mid-western township of one thousand, one hundred, three-and-a-half white people seemed redundant. The negotiation of racial identity is more complicated than simply tagging a town with a racist label. Expanding my ethnographic gaze to include not only Jay, but the sea of white that surrounded him, I began to see how race as an outer identity dimension (Jones & McEwen, 2000) moved closer or further away from the rural core as it was perceived by both Jay and his white classmates.

In this vastly white rural town, Jay and his hair styles became central figures in

the construction of racial identity and difference. Through his embodiment of race and difference, the corresponding dots on the intersecting circles of the *MMDI* (Jones & McEwen, 2000) swung ever closer to the core and gained salience for both Jay and his white classmates. With each of Jay's new hairstyles, his classmates were faced with the facts of their own racial identity. Some would perpetuate the racist attitudes that had been instilled in them. Others, like the boy above who voiced concern over his ignorance about people of different races, would become more aware their community's shortcomings:

That's just one thing I don't like about this town, everybody is racist. I think it would be cool to live in a different state or whatever just because here you don't have much culture. I would like to experience multicultural places and all that kind of stuff... 'cause you don't get that much here. ...there's like maybe two African Americans in town. They don't get treated with the most respect they should....

I feel like that, because I don't know, do you know Jay? He's one of my best friends... That's one reason why I think everyone should experience a different culture, because I think people are so ignorant about other things because this is where they've been their whole life, so they don't know anything different. [PII-5-2]

Queering the Modern Rural

"Tauni¹⁰, get off him!" came the cry from the teacher. The boy who found himself the object of Tauni's embrace made a show of hands to demonstrate that he had done nothing to instigate this rather extended hug. "Am I going to have to write you up for a PDA [public display of affection]?"

"I don't care," Tauni replied, letting go the boy in her arms. "I've gotten a PDA before. It was with a girl though..." I had noticed these two girls frequently playing

¹⁰ Pseudonym used throughout.

with each others' hair, rubbing each others' backs, and being generally physically affectionate with one another in class. I had also already heard the story of the PDA from one of the teachers who thought "the whole thing was just creepy" [PI]. I had been standing next to Tauni and her huggee when she turned to me to say, "I don't care. I'm not homosexual and I don't care what people think. I have a friend who is, though."

"Oh, yeah?" I listened.

"Yep. He was told he couldn't bring a boy to any of our school dances."

With the mention of homosexuality and school dances, the conversation was off and running. Several other students joined in along with the teacher to question Tauni about the accuracy of her information. "He was told by the administration that he could not bring a boy to one of our dances. It was last year."

The teacher did not believe this to be accurate and said she would ask the principal once the class period was over. The principal said, "Well, in this day and age there wouldn't be a thing I could do about it..." [PI]. Meanwhile, the conversation among the students turned to what would happen if somebody did bring a same-sex date to a dance. Tauni said it would be all right with her, while three football players, who had been playing cards over a desk a few rows away, caught wind of the conversation. One of them spoke up, "That is just not what Danville is about. That is just not who we are. Maybe if we lived in that other place, but not in Danville."

"You mean California?" one of his buddies asked.

"Yeah, wherever." At this point, another student posed to him the question of what would happen if one of their classmates brought someone of the same-sex as a date to a school dance. The football player stopped and thought for a minute, "Oh, well, we

wouldn't care about that. I don't want to see them kissing or nothin', but it's not like we'd *do* anything to him/”

His buddy interrupted, “/Why are we even talkin’ about this when none of us are gay?!”

Little did they know during this conversation in October that this would be the year Danville would see its first same-sex couple at the prom. When I asked Cory¹¹ why he had decided to bring a gay date to the prom, he said, “Well, first of all I wanted to go to the prom with somebody who I really wanted to go to the prom with.” It had also been important to him to, as he put it, “pave the way for other kids” to do so in the future.

As it turned out, the date was a 31 year old man from out of town whose age seemed as much the controversy for Cory’s community as the fact that the couple was homosexual. Cory had not known the man to be as old as he was when he asked him to the prom, but to the controversy he replied, “If there was an age limit, somebody should’ve told me. I mean, it used to be that seniors couldn’t bring freshmen dates to the prom, but no one seems to care about that now. Tauni brought her boyfriend and *he’s* older, *he’s* already graduated...”

To watch the controversy of the first gay prom date in Danville was interesting, but also telling were the conversations leading up to the prom. About two and a half weeks beforehand, Cory had announced in class that he was thinking about “asking a guy” to the prom. As Jay’s hairstyles had throughout the year, Cory’s announcement set the identity dots of the *MMDI* (Jones & McEwen, 2000) in motion for both Cory and his classmates. The identity dimension of sexual orientation became salient for everyone

¹¹ Pseudonym used throughout.

involved as there was, of course, much discussion to be had among Cory's classmates. His decision to publicly identify as gay left classmates faced with the facts of their own sexual orientation. It was commonly assumed that this meant Cory's classmates were left to consider their heterosexuality, but during my time there, two additional students had also identified themselves to me as gay or bisexual. This identity dimension became particularly salient for these students.

Some students made it very clear that they were not in support of having a gay classmate or there being a gay couple at their prom, while others seemed to think it would be fine. One girl said, "You're gonna see it out there. We might as well get used to it" [PI]. But there was one reaction that caught my interest in particular. It was one of Cory's classmates who said with sadness, "I don't care if he brings somebody who is *gay*, but [the date] he's not gonna *know* anybody. Like, he's not gonna have anybody to talk to, and that means Cory prob'ly won't come out to the party after" [PI].

As it turned out, the prom came off without a hitch. The couple in question arrived after the Grand March so as to spare themselves a true public outing, but they did dance together under the watchful eye of the administration and chaperones. I heard a few homophobic slurs directed their way by other students, but for the most part Cory and his date were treated with respect, even if stand-offish. Cory's date had played and coached football, which left him with conversation companions for much of the evening. The couple did not attend the party after, but for a few hours that night, the rural gaze expanded somewhat.

Summary

This chapter has explicated the role of the school and the community in the

(co)production of rurality. Using the *Model of Multiple Identity Dimensions (MMDI)* (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and interview and observation data, the chapter provided a discussion of the ways in which students from Danville incorporated their rural context into their identity and experienced it as a core sense of self. The importance of knowing and being known and the rural gaze were integrated into the discussion as they were influential in the processes of developing a core sense of self and social identity dimensions, and as having imbued with significance rural ways of being.

CHAPTER 7

DANVILLE GOES TO COLLEGE

It has been interesting hearing about the students from Danville who graduated... Many seem to just return to Danville on a weekly basis... I think several will drop out, just citing different reasons, but mostly that they weren't really prepared for the rigor of college academics. Funny, when you grow up in a small town, you spend your whole teenage years thinking you really want to get out of Danville, only to find out when you get out, all you really want to do is return to what is familiar. (Danville parent, personal communication, Autumn 2005)

I sat in the bleachers of my first Blue Devils football game and a group of three young people chose the seats behind me from which to take in the game. As they settled in, it became evident that they were graduates of Danville's Class of 2004. I heard one of the girls say, "I missed the town."

Her friend, slightly incredulous, asked, "You what?"

"I missed the *town*. I just missed it here," she repeated. This was her explanation for having withdrawn from college during the first two weeks of the fall semester at the state university where she had enrolled about two hours away from home.

“I can understand you missing your family or friends and stuff, but the *town*?”

“Yeah. I just, I don’t know, I just missed, like, *Danville*.”

As I listened to this conversation, I began to understand how the antinomy of rurality and college would play out in the lives of students bound for college from Danville.

The Antinomy of Rurality and College

As it was described in Chapter 6, the relationship of Danville High School to the town of Danville exemplified the antinomy of individual realization versus the reproduction of culture outlined in Bruner’s (1996) discussion of the complexity of educational aims:

...on the one hand, it is unquestionably the function of education to enable people, individual human beings, to operate at their fullest potential, to equip them with the tools and the sense of opportunity to use their wits, skills, and passions to the fullest. The antinomic counterpart to this is that the function of education is to reproduce the culture that supports it... (Bruner, 1996, p. 67)

Taking their enrollment and persistence in college to connote students’ preparedness to “operate at their fullest potential,” the antinomy with which the school and, consequently, the students were faced became apparent given the integrality of each in the production of culture and identity in Danville.

Going to college from a place like Danville often entails leaving the rural town altogether. “For years the conventional wisdom passed on to rural youth by family, friends, counselors and teachers has been to stay in school, go on to college and from there to a city where the better paying jobs are located” (Hobbs, 1998, p. vii). This

advice thrives amid discourses of neoliberalism and globalization which emphasize the market as the best way to meet human needs (Edmondson, 2003; Stromquist, 2002). It is further buttressed in discourses of vagabond capital (Mitchell, Marston, & Katz, 2004) and the postmodern, which leave all manner of capital and subjectivity unmoored in time or place (Cavallaro, 2001; Foucault, 1991a). In communities hit by hard economic times, this “wisdom” takes on an almost transparent logic when forms of capital, including human, social, and cultural, are perceived to be more mobile than ever before.

The antinomic counterpart of this is rurality where, at least in Danville, human needs were met only in small part in the market. In greater part, they were met in relation to one another. As they were answered in Danville, questions of self and subjectivity were not unbound in time *or* place. The experiences of college and college-bound students from Danville suggest that while capital in its many forms may be mobile, people may not be.

The Postsecondary Outlook from Danville

In the year 2000, adults in the United States ages 25 and older had attained four-year degrees at a rate of 24.4 percent. That same year, nonrural adults had been awarded degrees from four-year institutions at a rate of 26.6 percent. This was true for rural adults at a rate of only 15.5 percent nationwide. In Danville, the percentage of the adult population 25 years of age and older who had attained a bachelor’s degree by the year 2000 was 11.3 (*Census 2000*, 2000; R. Gibbs, 2003).

The years 1996 through 2005 saw the graduating classes of Danville with college intention rates as high as 43 percent (2003), which was on a par with national college enrollment rates, which hovered near 45 percent for that same time period (“The 2005-

2006 Almanac," 2006). The rate of persistence to degree, however, was nowhere near as high. From the class of 2004, for example, just 4 of the 12 students from Danville who enrolled in pursuit of a four-year degree persisted to their second year of study at the colleges and in the academic programs to which they at first enrolled. Just over 41 percent of the class had college intentions, but only 13 percent persisted in their postsecondary pursuits. [These comparisons are illustrated in Table 7.1].

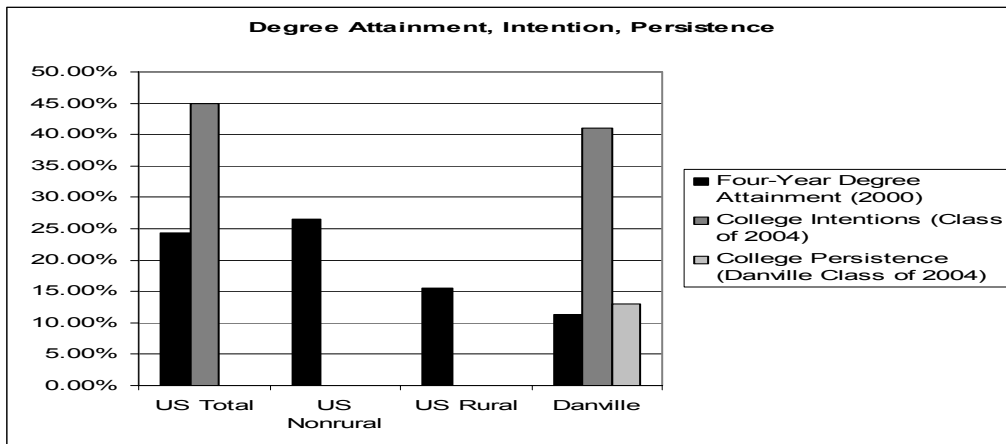


Table 7.1: Four-Year Degree Attainment, Intention, Persistence

The rates of degree attainment in Danville indicated that college students from Danville would be at high risk of academic failure or early withdrawal from college:

At present, researchers conceptualize the high-risk college student as one whose academic background (academic preparation), prior performance (low high school or first-semester college GPA), or personal characteristics may contribute

to academic failure or early withdrawal from college (Choy, 2002; Yeh, 2002).

Personal characteristics are identified here as those things that place the student in a population...without a long or necessarily successful history in higher education” (Pizzolato, 2003, pp. 798-799).

Danville graduates were part of a population at both national and local levels with a history that was neither long nor necessarily successful in terms of four-year degree attainment. While the previously iterated barriers and supports to higher education, such as family expectations, economics, and first-generation college student status explain some of the risk rural students face in higher education, this chapter offers a cultural explanation as to why students from places like Danville might be likely candidates for early withdrawal from college. As well, the chapter presents findings with regard to the few who might persist in pursuit of a four-year degree. Foreshadowing this discussion are the words of the Danville parent with which this chapter opened, “...all you really want to do is return to what is familiar.”

Patterns of Postsecondary Persistence in Danville

The patterns of postsecondary persistence for research participants from Danville were consistent with Elliott’s (1989) finding at the University of Iowa that postsecondary persistence for rural students existed on a continuum extending from continuous enrollment to complete withdrawal from higher education [See Table 7.2]. While previous research has investigated the postsecondary persistence of students from rural areas, none has discussed where students go when they leave college, whether upon early withdrawal or upon attainment of their degree. This is a significant oversight, because for students from Danville, all roads led back to Danville regardless of their placement on

Elliott's continuum.

Position 1:	Enrollment at the University of Iowa Continuous Persistence at the University of Iowa
Position 2:	Enrollment at the University of Iowa Withdrawal Enrollment in a Different Institution Reenrollment at the University of Iowa
Position 3:	Enrollment at the University of Iowa Withdrawal Enrollment and Persistence at a Different Four-Year Institution
Position 4:	Enrollment at the University of Iowa Withdrawal Enrollment and Persistence at a Two-Year Postsecondary Institution
Position 5:	Enrollment at the University of Iowa Withdrawal Enrollment at a Two-Year Institution Withdrawal from the Educational System
Position 6:	Enrollment at the University of Iowa Withdrawal from the Educational System

Table 7.2 Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence for Rural Students at the University of Iowa (Elliott, 1989, pp. 161 & 166)

The shape of the postsecondary pathways that led students to college and back again to Danville cannot be understood separately from the processes of culture and identity elaborated in Chapters 5 and 6, for it was in the light of these deep structures of place and self that college-bound students from Danville negotiated their transition to

college or university life. As Table 7.1 suggested, these negotiations would most often result in early withdrawal from the four-year colleges and/or programs of study into which Danville students initially enrolled and few would follow the pattern of continuous enrollment to degree.

Of the five first-year college students from Danville interviewed for this study, only one, Katherine¹², would persist to her second year of study in pursuit of a four-year degree at the institution of her initial enrollment. Her classmate, Ethan, would remain at the institution of his initial enrollment, but would alternate between two- and four-year degree programs during his several changes of major, thereby suggesting a seventh position on Elliott's (1989) continuum. Devin and Lori withdrew from the institutions of their initial enrollment following their first year of college, with Devin persisting in pursuit of a four-year degree at his transfer institution and Lori enrolling in a two-year institution. Leigh, the fifth interview participant from Danville's Class of 2004, would withdraw from the educational system altogether.

The points on the continuum between continuous persistence and nonpersistence have been labeled "modified persistence" in Table 7.3, where I have adapted Elliott's model to reflect the persistence/nonpersistence patterns of the five first-year college students introduced in the preceding paragraph. The distinction of "modified persistence" is intended to tease the idea of persistence *toward* a four-year degree apart from persistence *through* degree in a single major at a single institution. In the experiences of the interview participants, the amount of modification required to persist into their second year of postsecondary study corresponded to their placement on the

¹² Pseudonyms used throughout.

Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence [Table 7.3]; the closer the students came to continuous persistence in a single major at a single institution, the smaller the modification made in their persistence pattern from the first to the second year of postsecondary study. Table 7.3 outlines the postsecondary persistence and withdrawal patterns of Katherine, Ethan, Devin, Lori, and Leigh, and lists their names along the left-hand side of the table according to the position on the continuum that best represents their persistence pattern from their first to their second year of postsecondary study.

During my time in Danville, I came to understand that Danville was not exempt from the educational barriers so often discussed in the literature on students from rural areas, but I also witnessed the pull of rurality – their culture and their identity – in the decisions college and college-bound students made with regard to postsecondary enrollment and persistence. The following analysis finds college and college-bound students from Danville contending with the antinomy of rurality and college as it manifested along the pathways of their postsecondary lives. Naturally, these pathways found their beginning in Danville High School, where teachers and administrators grappled with the dilemmas of educating Danville’s youth *out* of Danville per the conventional wisdom earlier observed by Hobbs (1998). Later, the antinomy of college versus Danville surfaced as an issue of postsecondary persistence as students were faced with the constant dilemma of choosing between Danville and higher education, which

<div style="text-align: center;"> Persistence ←———— Modified Persistence —————→ Nonpersistence 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 </div>	
Position 1: Katherine	Enrollment at a Four-Year Institution Continuous Persistence toward Four-Year Degree of Initial Interest at Institution of Initial Enrollment
Position 2: Ethan	Enrollment in a Two-Year Degree Program at a Two- and Four-Year Degree Granting Institution with the Intention of Enrolling in a Four-Year Degree Program Change Major Several Times Enrollment and Persistence toward Four-Year Degree <u>not</u> of Initial Interest at Institution of Initial Enrollment
Position 3:	Enrollment at a Four-Year Institution Withdrawal Enrollment at a Different Institution Reenrollment at Institution of Initial Enrollment
Position 4: Devin	Enrollment at a Four-Year Institution Change Major Several Times Withdrawal Enrollment and Persistence toward Four-Year Degree <u>not</u> of Initial Interest at a Two- and Four-Year Degree Granting Institution
Position 5: Lori	Enrollment at a Four-Year Institution Withdrawal Enrollment and Persistence at a Two-Year Postsecondary Institution
Position 6:	Enrollment at a Four-Year Institution Withdrawal Enrollment at a Two-Year Institution Withdrawal from the Educational System
Position 7: Leigh	Enrollment in a Four-Year Degree Program at a Two-and Four-Year Degree Granting Institution Withdrawal from the Educational System

Table 7.3 Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence from First to Second Year of College for Five First Year Students from Danville

ultimately became a choice between self and college. Finally, the decision to return to Danville, whether temporarily or more permanently, is revealed as a means of resolving the push of college and the pull of country, not as an act indicative of failure but an act facilitative of self.

Choosing College

Students face a complex decision when choosing a college. High school seniors cannot and do not consider all of the 3,000 possible collegiate choices (Simon, 1957). The alternatives people consider are influenced by their physical location, social networks, and environmental stimuli, as well as the anticipated goals and consequences for college. The high school senior's frame of reference and perceptions are conditioned by the evoking mechanism – the high school context for college choice. (McDonough, 1997, p. 10)

With her book, *Choosing College: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity*, McDonough (1997) addressed issues of access and equity in higher education as they related to school context and admission to college. Given the high school context for college choice as it was felt by Danville graduates, it could come as a surprise that 12 of the 29 graduates from the under funded, under prepared, unpretentious beginnings of Danville's Class of 2004 had determined that they would enroll in a four-year baccalaureate program out of high school. Given the sequence of events below, it may not come as a surprise that, for the five interview participants with whom I met, the pathways leading to and through their first year of college were fraught with uncertainty.

Katherine and Ethan:

“My grades came in and I was pretty upset”

Katherine had considered being a doctor, but only briefly. Her true calling was to be a nurse. When we spoke during spring break of her first year of college, Katherine was pursuing a four-year degree in Nursing at Waller University¹³, a religiously affiliated liberal arts college with an undergraduate enrollment of 1,800 located about 90 minutes from Danville. She had done everything she could to prepare herself for college when she graduated high school, throughout which she described herself as having been a “good student.”

Katherine was one of the few students from Danville whose college decision process had been fairly direct. She and her Mom had visited one other campus, the college at which her brother had been enrolled, and Katherine “thought for sure” she would enroll there in the fall. “I really liked the campus,” she said, “but umm it’s in a really bad area, like in the ghetto...but then I went and saw Waller and, I don’t know, I just liked it better. I only applied to Waller.”

When she left for college, Katherine had believed herself well prepared, having taken AP English, the only Advanced Placement course offered in Danville, and scoring 18 on her college entrance exam, the ACT. She had done well in all her high school classes, had been highly involved in extracurricular activities, and was happy to be attending Waller, the college of her first choice, where the average GPA and ACT scores were 3.2 and 22 respectively. At the end of her first year at Waller, however, Katherine found herself struggling academically:

¹³ Pseudonym: Waller University located about 90 minutes from Danville, a Catholic affiliated small liberal arts college with an undergraduate enrollment of 1,800.

Classes are a lot harder than what I expected. My grades are really important to me and so in high school I did really good, and then I went to college and - I'm not doing bad, but I'm not doing as good as I want to, so it's kind of frustrating. It just isn't coming easy to me.

Katherine said she felt lost in her classes. There was just so much that she didn't know. She planned to retake two of her courses over the summer in hopes of earning a passing grade, "'cause you have to get a 'C'," she said, "and I got a 'C'-minus."

Ethan, the student occupying Position 2 on the Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence [Table 7.3], had also met with academic difficulty during his first year at TSU Newell¹⁴ to which he had been commuting from Danville since September when we spoke during the spring quarter of his first year of study. His college decision process had not been nearly as straightforward as Katherine's. During the following exchange, which took place about 30 minutes into our interview, I found myself working very hard to follow the convoluted route that had landed Ethan at Newell that year:

Tammy: Now- now originally, though, you would have been thinking about going to Columbus for engineering.

Ethan: Yes.

Tammy: Now you're thinking about journalism- does that change your decision at all?

Ethan: No umm I'd have to transfer anyway. Newell doesn't give the engineering or uhh journalism it only- it gives you education, uhh, business- there's only a few that they give out and then you stay there all four years and the two I picked weren't either of 'em, so.

Tammy: So you're still thinking about transferring.

Ethan: Yeah.

¹⁴ Pseudonym: The State University Newell located about 45 minutes from Danville, a regional campus of The State University with an undergraduate enrollment of 2,200.

Tammy: So, first you were thinking about Gingham¹⁵...

Ethan: Yes.

Tammy: ...and that was because that's where [your friends were] but then [one of them] transferred?

Ethan: Yeah...I went down there a couple times and saw the campus and they [my friends] talked me into going down there and that was fine and I was- I was- at that time I was still engineering and they only have a two year engineering program, so I'd have to transfer. That's the main reason I didn't go there. So when [my friend] transferred and it was just going to be [my other friend] and I decided I'd just go to The State University¹⁶...

Tammy: So you didn't really like Gingham, you just wanted to go there 'cause the guys were there.

Ethan: Basically and cause I- just so I wouldn't get bored. It was between- at that time it was between business and engineering for my degree and I could get a business degree down there. I couldn't get engineering. So I was like, 'Do I really want to transfer after two years being down there or just go to The State University where I can be there all four years and not have to worry about transfer or nothing?'

Tammy: So now Newell.

Ethan: I went to Buckeye Boys State between my junior and senior year up in Ogg State¹⁷ and I really liked Ogg State campus while I was up there. I liked the atmosphere and stuff. I was there for nine- maybe nine days and I really liked it up there....I was thinking I would go up there, but...Then I switched to Gingham...I was all ready. If I applied there, was accepted and everything, I start. And, umm, [a friend who] graduated with me came back from his State University visit (which I had been up there before looking around), said that he loved it up there, and said I should go look at it and I'd already been up there so I didn't worry about it. I also applied there to Columbus to get in the engineering program and everything. Got accepted and everything, then one day my Dad gave his "you're not going to Columbus" [talk]. He said, 'Yeah, you're- I think you should go to Newell for at least the first year' and I didn't want to argue with my Dad. I'm a big guy but he's just as big you know he has a little bit more of a

¹⁵ Pseudonym: Gingham College, Presbyterian affiliated liberal arts college located 90 minutes from Danville with an undergraduate enrollment of 1,500.

¹⁶ Pseudonym: The State University, Public research institution located 80 minutes from Danville with an undergraduate enrollment of 37,411

¹⁷ Pseudonym: Ogg State University, Public university located 2 hours and 40 minutes from Danville with an undergraduate enrollment of 20,276.

temper than I do and if I argued I was afraid tempers would flare and stuff so I was just like, ‘All right I’ll agree and I’ll agree to disagree and just go to Newell for the first year.’

When we met, Ethan had finally decided to enroll in a two-year degree program with the intention to transfer into a four-year program at TSU in Columbus during his second year. His first set of grades, though, had been a discouragement to say the least:

I felt like the dumb ass to be quite frank. I couldn’t no longer just breeze through. I mean [in high school], I always said I’d breeze through. I was just, wait ‘til the last minute to get it done... I tried doing that my first quarter in college. My grades came in and I was pretty upset. That’s the most difficult thing.

Ethan pulled his GPA up from a 1.7 to a more respectable 2.65 during his second quarter of enrollment, but his first set of grades had been quite a disappointment to this student who had graduated high school with a 3.78 GPA and had been named a Scholar Athlete during his senior year.

The academic difficulty with which Katherine and Ethan contended during their first year of college is illustrative of the academic risk students from Danville faced due to the weak educational scaffolding that existed there. This fragility stemmed in part from the lack of financial resources with which the Danville school district struggled. The school district in Danville had historically been classified by the Ohio Department of Education as “rural poor.” The percentage of the population 16 years and over in the labor force was only 59.5, compared to the national number, which was equal to 63.9 percent. The mean household income was \$28,636 in Danville, compared to the national mean of \$41,994. The number of families living below poverty was equal to 15 percent, also higher than the national rate, as was the percentage of individuals living below poverty at 15.2 (*Census 2000*, 2000).

In the fall of 2004, having heard news reports of 350-dollar activity fees being assessed some of the high school students of the Columbus suburbs, I arrived in Danville to an outcry from the teachers who had been told that there would be a 25-dollar transportation fee charged to students involved in activities requiring bus transportation. They needed to be able to pay the bus drivers, the administration said. Teachers immediately expressed their concern over certain families who had two or more students in school and who simply would not be able to afford this fee for each of their students' extracurricular activities. Some worried that this policy did not bode well for the football team.

To be sure, matters of economy were a barrier set at the beginning of the postsecondary pathways of students from Danville. College-going participants, however, said they were able to piece together the necessary funds for college through high school scholarships, summer jobs, student loans, family contributions, and financial aid packages offered at the postsecondary level. Katherine put it this way, "Money's an issue, but you can come up with the money, you know?"

In one extraordinary case, the valedictorian of the class of 2005 received from the small liberal arts college he would attend an academic scholarship that would provide for his tuition and fees for the entire four-year program in which he had enrolled. From their perspectives as first-year college students, however, interview participants spoke at length about the lack of educational resources with which they had been prepared for college. From their college vantage points, these students now recognized the financial hurdles that had accompanied their college preparation. Katherine said:

Science is my hardest right now... I think [our science teacher in Danville] is a

wonderful teacher. It's just if we had more things that he could do, more resources and I don't know - - but like Chemistry I had- I dropped that [this year in college] so I didn't even finish Chemistry... I didn't know anything. I was just learning it for the first time basically, but like...

[Our science teacher]'s a really good teacher he just/ If we had more money and more things that he could do, it would be better... Like Anatomy. I'm glad I took Anatomy, but it's so::: different than college. Like, it was just the basic stuff that/ Some of my friends [at college], they dissected cats and got into that in high school and were more into anatomy, whereas we only do the skeleton [in Danville], so. I love that class here, but I hate - - - it's just so frustrating... Or even like in Chemistry, to do any kind of experiment, I don't ever remember doing any kind of experiments with chemicals or you know - - -

Devin and Lori:

"We didn't know what we wanted to do"

Devin was enrolled at Gingham College, a four-year liberal arts college about 90 minutes from Danville. "Painful," was how he described his college decision process, "because I was scared," he said.

... 'cause I didn't know what to do/ I didn't know what/ I didn't know what like my major was going to be or anything... I'm just like, 'I don't know what to do for the rest of my life. How can you expect me to know what I'm gonna do the rest of my life?' I put undecided on there [the admissions form]... 'cause I knew I didn't know what to do yet.

The chance to participate in college athletics had been appealing to Devin when he had made his college choice. He had played football, basketball, and baseball for Danville, and when we met at Gingham at the beginning of April, he said, "I played here, football, one year. Now I'm playing baseball here."

In his first semester at Gingham he had earned, "...all 'A's and then...a 'D' in sociology. Yeah, I bombed that," Devin said. "First semester I came up like a two six or something like that." From Position 4 on the Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence [Table 7.3], Devin added his frustration to that of Katherine's

on the topic of educational resources in Danville:

I took four math classes and they were all the harder ones Danville offered and what made me mad is how we had to buy our own calculus books, because the school wasn't going to pay for them...there's only like four or five kids in it and you'd think they'd buy us books, but they didn't. They made us buy 'em ourselves.

The school was a source of intense pride for the Danville community, but the resources to fund it were scarce and growing more so. In the fall of 2004, there was still talk of the school levy that had passed by three hard fought votes in the spring just before the interview participants had graduated. The measure had come up on a special ballot after failing in November, at which point the School Board and concerned community members had taken to the churches to urge their neighbors to support their schools¹⁸. Although the levy won support in the second vote, the school would not see its benefits for another two years, long after Katherine, Ethan, Devin, Lori, and Leigh had graduated.

Even as Katherine, Ethan, and Devin discussed the weaknesses of the educational platform from which they would step into college, and even as they linked these weaknesses to the lack of funding for educational resources in Danville, it is interesting to note the inverse relationship between their placement on the Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence [Table 7.3] and their reported academic performance in college. Katherine, who was retaking courses under threat of academic failure, was the only one of the five interview participants to persist in Position 1 on the continuum. Ethan, who also did very poorly during his first term at TSU Newell, held steady in Position 2 of continuous enrollment at the institution of his initial enrollment.

¹⁸ (I was told that it was difficult to pass school levies in Danville because of the Amish vote. Since the Amish did not participate in the public school system, they were said to frequently vote against such measures.)

Devin, whose grades were highest of the interview participants thus far, occupied a position furthest of the three from continuous persistence. Lori, who had entered a small regional university and community college with an ACT score of 21, would continue this trend from Position 5, further still from continuous persistence on the Revised Continuum.

When we met in August following her first year at Evans University¹⁹ where she had been enrolled in a four-year Nursing program 3 hours from Danville, Lori described what her academic experience had been like during her first year of college:

I did good. I enjoyed the whole year. I liked getting challenged. I like sciences a lot. I had a biology class and like, it was review for me so, like, I loved being able to be like, 'oh, I know that,' you know, and all the kids would come to me and ask me questions. I loved that and I love learning new stuff like that. ...learning new stuff... That was one thing I liked the most, 'cause like, I took a psych course and that intrigued me more than I ever thought it would. Like some people are like, 'I hate that class.' I'm like, 'Are you crazy? That is the coolest class I've ever taken in my life.' I loved it. I really like getting challenged. And I'm looking forward to nurses training, because I know it will be a very large challenge.

Lori was, at present, enrolled in a two-year Technical College²⁰ to which she would commute from Danville for her second year of nurses training. Like Devin, the chance to participate in college athletics had been important to Lori. She said she had been looking for a place where she "might possibly play basketball. I was on the JV team and I think that was my turning decision, 'cause I went [to Evans] like two months before school started and tried out for the team and I made it, so I was like, 'Okay. I'll go there,' 'cause it has the program I wanted and everything, so it just all kind of fell into place."

¹⁹ Pseudonym: Evans University, Small regional university and community college located 3 hours from Danville with an undergraduate enrollment of 523

²⁰ Pseudonym: Technical College, Shares a campus with TSU Newell located 45 minutes from Danville with student enrollment of 2,183.

If Lori had any complaint about the college preparation she had received in high school, it was found in the lack of emphasis placed on college entrance during her senior year. In Danville High School, there was a course known as Senior Projects, which every graduating class member was required to take. On the faces of the senior class subsequent to Lori's, I saw sheer misery when I went to Senior Projects and found students learning the difference between a cross-stitch and a back-stitch. Less than six months from college enrollment, the college-bound seniors among the group were sewing and baking and learning to balance a checkbook. The Senior Projects curriculum contained some useful life lessons, but from her position as a first-year college student Lori shared her perspective on the class she had been required to take the year before:

I think like, it would have helped me if they would have talked more about, like, how many different professions are out there and, like, really help you to narrow down your likes and dislikes to like, maybe show you what you *could* be good at or what you *could* enjoy... They never really talked about it...

That's what we thought the Senior Projects were supposed to be. We thought it was supposed to be getting things ready for college. Getting applications ready. Getting essays ready so a teacher can look over them to make sure we got everything we need to have in there. We all thought it was going to be actually helpful. That we thought we could sit and talk and figure out what we were going to do, 'cause like all of us were stressing really. We didn't know what we wanted to do, because being from such a small town, you know, you think you're choices are really limited when they're really absolutely not.

... you know of engineering, or a nurse, or you know that kind of stuff like your parents or your friend's parents do, [but] I don't know, stuff like, city jobs or something. I don't know how to explain it. Stuff like that. You don't think you can do that, because you never heard of it. But what if that is what you're supposed to do and you're really good at it. How are you supposed to know? Someone who's in charge of getting you ready for the future doesn't even mention it once. Like, I think that's what Senior Projects should be about. Opening your eyes to everything that's out there and helping each kid in there to realize, you know, what they love and what they could enjoy doing for the next 20, 30 years of their lives. And that's what I thought Senior Projects was going to be, but I got a big shock. That's not what it was.

Like Lori, I had noticed the lack of emphasis on college entrance during the time I spent in school that year. With nearly one quarter of the students in the class of 2005 interested in attending college in the fall, the ambivalence with which college entrance was being addressed in school was conspicuous, indeed. A grounded survey administered to the class of 2005 demonstrated the importance of parental input in postsecondary decisions for students (college-bound or not) with 80 percent of the 49 survey respondents indicating that their parents had been most helpful to them in deciding what they would do following graduation. Of the 13 survey respondents intending to enroll in college, 11 indicated that their parents had been most helpful in making this decision with the remaining two suggesting siblings and aunts and uncles as those whose opinions and advice mattered most in the college decision process. Just 5 of the 49 survey respondents said that the Guidance Counselor had been helpful in deciding what to do after high school and 17 listed a teacher. Of the 13 respondents who indicated they would be enrolling in a bachelor's degree program, none indicated that the Guidance Counselor or Principal had been helpful in this decision, while just four indicated that a teacher had been helpful to them in deciding what they would do once they graduated.

The lack of emphasis on college entrance to which Lori and the grounded survey responses spoke could be traced to the antinomy of rurality and higher education, this pair of "large truths, which, though both may be true, nonetheless contradict each other" (Bruner, 1996, p. 66). On the one hand, it was true that as a site of cultural reproduction, the school was important to the persistence of the modern rural of Danville. In actuality, as seen in Chapters 5 and 6, the school was intimately laced with the expressive culture

and practices of identity found in the town, in many ways valued more for its role in the community than its educational function. The antinomic counterpart with which the school's administration and teachers were faced was this: to enable students who aspired to college to "use their wits, skills, and passions to the fullest" (Bruner) meant to prepare them to do so elsewhere, thereby setting one of Danville's most treasured assets, its human capital, on a path that led directly out of Danville (Hobbs, 1998). The balance among these contradictions in the school was frequently found in what was called *teaching to the test*.

Teaching to the Test

In the fall of 2004, there were five teachers who had been born and raised in Danville who were now among the ranks of the high school faculty. In a particularly poignant example, one of the science teachers was the third generation of science teachers from Danville who had gone away to college and returned to teach and ultimately replace his mentor as a science teacher at the high school. In so doing, this teacher personified the antinomy elucidated above by Bruner (1996, p. 67).

Caught between the rock of rural culture and the hard place of standardized testing that had accompanied the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the contradiction with which this teacher currently contended was Darwin's Theory of Evolution. As a product of the Danville school system, this science teacher had not been taught about human evolution in school. The narratives of historical interview participants were in concurrence, with one participant saying, "I mean, evolution was never taught. I mean, you know, topics like that- I never heard about evolution 'til I got to college" [PIII-2-1].

The science teacher had earlier expressed to me some resentment about the state

mandated testing, saying that he did not like the idea of what he called “teaching to the test.” As I arrived to his classroom for an interview one day, he had been talking to some of the 10th-grade students who had taken the state mandated Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) and he asked them about the questions that had been on the test. As our interview got underway, the science teacher was not happy to have learned that there had not been a single question (of a possible six the state had said could be included on the test) about evolution.

Knowing that evolution had not heretofore been taught in Danville, I was surprised that it was a topic of conversation at all. “Do you teach evolution, now?”

“Well, yeah, we have to since they say it might be on the test.”

“How does that go over,” I asked, trying to imagine the response this might elicit from the community.

“Oh, I don’t teach human evolution,” he said. “I teach the evolution of different species, but not human.”

Today a man of modern science, this teacher had no personal objection to teaching the evolution theory in its entirety. In fact, in what he saw as a humorous subversion of the dominant paradigm, he bought and applied a “Darwin Fish” to the bumper of his car in declaration of his point of view [See Appendix D]. The science teacher had grown up in this town, though, and was all too familiar with the religious convictions that were held in direct conflict with those of his chosen academic area. In fact, upon noticing the emblem, his colleague who taught Chemistry said to him, “You’re braver than I!” Yet, the science teacher did not want to risk the loss of the community’s support in teaching to this particular test, so his focus became the balance of the

antinomic functions of education, which he found in teaching to the test and no more.

Taking as its educational aim to teach to the test and only to the test, the school was able to succeed in meeting state mandated standards for improvement and to use those same standards as a rationale for its curricular choices. For example, in the case of evolution theory, it could be argued that it was part of the curriculum because it was required by the state. In the case of college entrance exams, it could be argued that there was no curricular focus because it was not required by the state and the survival of the school depended entirely upon student performance on the OGT, which was administered at the 10th-grade level.

The antinomic conundrum of college preparation was not lost on Danville's college-bound seniors, for whom college entrance might prove the definitive test. In the fall of 2004, there was much excitement on the part of the administration that the high school had received an improved designation of 'excellent' as a result of their performance on the *2003-2004 School Year Report Card* issued by the Ohio Department of Education. This designation was based on statewide assessments (the OGT), graduation rates, and attendance rates. It also included an Adequate Yearly Progress (or AYP) determination (toward improvement) and a Performance Index Score calculation (*2003-2004 School Year Report Card*, 2004).

Because the consequences of receiving a poor grade on the *School Year Report Card* could be dire, and potentially included the replacement of staff or contracting with a nonprofit entity to operate the building (*Guide for Ohio's Report Card System*, 2004-2005), much emphasis was placed on preparing Danville 10th-graders to do well on the OGT. This had been the focus of much of the advanced training for teachers in the fall

when they had been intent on mapping curricula and developing grading rubrics attuned to the test. Meanwhile, 10th-grade activity periods were spent in OGT tutoring and the guidance counselor was run ragged trying to coordinate the testing schedule at the end of the year. When posters outlining the content of the OGT were distributed to be hung on each classroom door, one of the senior class remarked, “That’s what I hate about this school. They give them all this stuff for the OGT and I can’t even get through the ACT” [PI]. This student would later be notified that he had received a score of 18 (of a possible 36) on the ACT.

Later that day, the students who had taken the ACT over the weekend told their math teacher about an ACT question they had not been able to complete. The teacher said, “Remember? We didn’t get that far in the book that year. We stopped right before we got to that part” [PI]. This was little consolation to these students who would receive scores of 14, 15, 17, 18, and 21 on this college entrance examination. While I did not have access to all of their scores, the word among the students was that the highest ACT score achievement had been in the mid-20s.

I asked several students what they had done to prepare for the ACT, and the response was empty. Because of Danville’s remote location, students were hard pressed to find an ACT preparation course within reach and besides, the cost of such a course would have been prohibitive for many of them. Late in the year, I finally bought a study guide for one of the football players who had yet to sit for the ACT, but who had expressed interest in going to college in the fall. I was told he missed the ACT requirement for Waller, his college of choice, by one point with a score of 17. Following the enthusiasm and determination with which the OGT had been addressed, the attention

paid to preparing students for college was underwhelming, at best.

Leigh:

“I wanna be able to make a difference like they do”

Leigh’s description of her teachers was somewhat contradictory to that of her classmates and the survey responses enumerated above. When we met during winter quarter of her first year at TSU Newell where she was enrolled in a four-year degree program, Leigh told me that she had felt not only encouraged, but inspired by some of Danville’s teachers:

[Our English teacher], she’s awesome. She’s like [gestures with wide open eyes and reverence], and [our science teacher]. They were some of the best teachers I had. I mean, don’t get me wrong, the other teachers are good too, like [the band director]. She’s like my mom, basically...she’s like, ‘you can do it,’ you know...[and] Spanish was great. She’s great. I love [our language teacher] to death. But...AP English and like..., I took Anatomy, it was like, ‘Gosh if [these teachers] can do this,’ I’m like, ‘This is awesome. I love all this stuff,’ you know? Like, ‘I wanna *do* something,’ you know. I wanna be able to make a difference like they do.

Despite these complimentary remarks about some of her teachers, from the position furthest from continuous persistence on the Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence [Table 7.3] Leigh questioned the relevance of some of the academic preparation she had received in high school as it applied to her college endeavors. “AP English. I think everyone should take it, because the first paper I wrote [in college], I got an A on it,” but then, much as she loved the class and the teacher, she said, “I took Spanish, but I don’t have to take a language [in college], so it doesn’t even matter.” Truth told, she added, speaking very softly, now, as though confiding a secret:

...some of [the other teachers] are kind of outdated (laughs). They’ve been here

so long...but, you know, it's Danville, and they're going to stick to their traditional - - - Like, teachers used to be stuck- stuck in their ways and I think the system's kind of old. Like, I know that they have to follow certain standards, but I think they get by. They slip by with just like [holding up the thumb and index finger of one hand indicating "very little"].

Of the five first-year interview participants, Leigh was the one whose college decision process suffered most the lack of high school context for college choice. Without an emphasis on college entrance in high school, Leigh was uncertain how to deal with the pressure she felt from her family:

Like when I said Ogg State, my step mom kind of got dead set on me going to Ogg State, ...and my other extended family. Every time I saw them, like, my uncle - umm he:: went to Ogg State, that's where he met my aunt and whatever - - so he kind of talked to me and told me all about it. But all I had were all these people who went to Ogg State so, like, that's all I heard about mostly. ...so I was like, 'O-kay, I guess,' you know. I wasn't like too thrilled to be going there but I was like, 'All right. I'll do this,' 'cause I was like - like I said - 'I know I'm going to college, it's just *where*?' I guess, like, it didn't- to me at that time, it didn't really make that big of a deal. I'm just going somewhere to get some kind of education (laughing) so::.

Despite her family's encouragement toward Ogg State, Leigh said:

...I even visited there and I liked it, but it was a little overwhelming for me 'cause I'm not used to/ Like I- I had totally grown out of anything big 'cause of going here [to Danville High School] so:: I was like, 'O-ka::y [unsure] ?'

Finally, Leigh described for me the process of having arrived at TSU Newell the previous fall:

I applied to Gingham, Oakland²¹, Ogg State, umm - - - and then like - - - was that it? No there's another one. I applied to a bunch of private schools 'cause it's free on the internet. I really wanted to go to Gingham, but it cost too much. Then Oakland was like- is good for education and Ogg State was good for education. I know I applied to those. I may have applied to one or two other ones...

...but out of state costs so much money. So, like private schools and out of state kinda like went away 'cause the military will pay for state schools. So I

²¹ Pseudonym: Oakland University, Brethren Church affiliated comprehensive university located 55 minutes from Danville with an undergraduate enrollment of 2,100.

was like, ‘O-kay let’s just stick to state schools.’ So I started looking into some of those and the two that really stuck out were Ogg State and Orlando²² and it was like TSU [The State University] was like way back there ‘cause I didn’t really wanna go there, so - - - I never even thought about going to the Newell branch. Like, that was not a choice at all.

I was going to go to Ogg State... Like, I was supposed to go in the military and stuff and I was gonna go through that and then just go to Ogg State, but then the military thing didn’t work out – I have a lot of allergies and stuff that I didn’t know about – I was going for all the wrong reasons at that time...so, like, I decided to go [to college] and I had no choice, I had to go to TSU Newell, which was like the best decision I ever made.

Choosing a Major

McDonough (1997) noted the high school as the “evoking mechanism” in the senior high school student’s frame of reference in the college choice process (p. 10). Keeping in mind the relationship between the high school and the town of Danville as elaborated in previous chapters, it stood to reason that their rural community would also act as an evoking mechanism for students bound for college from Danville. This proved to be the case for Katherine, Ethan, Devin, Lori, and Leigh, for not one of them imagined their future elsewhere. When I asked interview participants where they imagined themselves in five or ten years, their answers placed them in or near Danville. Ethan said, “I don’t like living in town, though, I’d rather live out in the country.” Either way, he would be close by.

Ethan and Devin thought they might want to “live down south” someday, but spoke of owning homes in or near Danville. Lori said she wanted to travel, but would always make her home near her family in Danville. Katherine might consider living outside of Danville:

²² Pseudonym: Orlando University, Public university located 2 hours and 15 minutes from Danville with an undergraduate enrollment of 15,300.

I think probably more in the Columbus area, 'cause since I'm in nursing I wanna work at like Children's Hospital or something and I don't want that drive, so. I don't know like, if I wanna be like *in the city* city, ...I don't know just a smaller area but, I think if I'm gonna have a good job I have to go- be in the city, so.

Even so, Katherine, along with the other interview participants, agreed with one of the rising seniors who said, "I want to be able to throw that stone, you know?" [PI]. In other words, they never imagined themselves living more than a stone's throw from Danville.

In this way, their rural hometown became the evoking mechanism in choice of college major. As Lori had observed in her discussion of Senior Projects, however, the career opportunities in the Danville area were limited, at best. This left students teetering between majors in education, engineering, the medical field (which is how they referred to occupations such as x-ray or ultrasound technology), or nursing.

"It's a big mess right now"

Leigh, who was commuting to TSU Newell, described what the process of choosing a major had been like for her:

Umm ye::::ah I'm kind of/ I just switched my major and it's like a big mess right now. I was studying for early childhood education, but I'm gonna be a music education major. I'm changing, but, like, can't until I/ but I'll eventually have my masters. Like, I want to get my masters before I graduate, but yeah, I'm studying for a bachelor's in something right now (laughs). Music education. That's what I/ I have to start lessons and stuff over again. I'm gonna transfer to, like, Ogg State or OU, so this is just my stepping stone - getting all my GECs [General Education Credits] - - - Like, I changed my class and just/ Like, I wanted to teach kindergarten, and then I'm like, 'ohh, I miss it so much,' So I'm going back and I'm just gonna work really hard to get back- 'cause I haven't played in so long, but- get back to where I was, and then audition next year sometime...

By the end of the summer following her first year of enrollment, Leigh would renounce college in favor of marriage with the wedding planned for October.

When Lori and I met in August, she had already decided to come home and enroll

at the Technical College that shared its campus with TSU Newell, to which she would commute for her second year of college. She talked to me about having been undecided about her major at Evans University during her first year there:

When I got down there...my major was nursing and like, I was looking at the stuff and I was having second thoughts and stuff, but I know I want something in the medical field. So I looked around and stuff and I saw diagnostic medical stenography, which is like ultrasound. So I looked into that and was like, 'You know what? I think I would really like that.' So I changed my major. My mom is like, 'Well you know they're accepting people into the [local] program in a couple of months. You have all your classes for it right?' And I'm like, 'Yeah.' So she's like, 'Do you even know what it's about?' And I'm like, 'Yeah ultrasound, you know, I've seen it on the Discovery Channel and stuff.' So she actually set up like a shadow date for me up at the hospital... I went there. I was bored out of my mind. I was there for five hours and after an hour and half I was like, 'This is all you do all day?' I was like, 'Uh-uh, no way.' So I got back to school and I was like, 'Nope back to undecided I think.'

Devin just wanted to be a coach:

Uhh, right now I'm- wanna be a phys ed. teacher and later on a principal. I wanna be a coach. I wanna be a coach. I was gonna be a math teacher, but I mean 'cause if I was a math teacher I'd get hired practically anywheres, but I don't/ ...Yeah. I was math. If I was gonna be a teacher it was gonna be math or phys ed. and health, but now/ I/ First when I came here I was going to be a business major. You know, I really want- I just want to be a coach. I was like, 'That's the main thing I'm getting into teaching for.'

Following his first year at Gingham College, Devin also moved back to Danville and planned to commute to TSU Newell the following year. He had not done as well as he had expected to do "grade-wise" and he thought that Newell would be a more affordable option while he decided what he really wanted to do.

Ethan's plan was to transfer to the main TSU campus in Columbus after finishing his first year at Newell, though I later learned that he had remained at Newell and enrolled in a four-year degree program there during his second year. As expressed in his earlier narrative, what Ethan's major would be depended in large part on the institution at

which he enrolled, which depended in large part on the institutions at which his friends enrolled. By the time we talked in March, this is what he had to say:

Right now [my major] it's journalism. It was engineering, but I changed to journalism - - - too many/ I thought I wanted to do engineering because I like working outside and stuff and my Dad works for the engineer's office in uh the...County Engineer and I worked for there last summer and I thought I liked it. Then I realized when I went to college I really hate math. I was- I was sitting there and - - - the more I/ I didn't even take math my first quarter. I tested out of math and I was like, 'I really don't like it, so why would I do it the rest of my life?' So- so I started looking at my requirements and there's like 14 maths I had to take and all these engineering classes. I was like, 'I'm just gonna switch to journalism. I can write anything,' but so that's how that is. I love to write, so I changed, so that's just how it is now.

One day back in Danville during AP English, as college decision letters were being sent and some of their classmates were making plans for the fall, I spoke with two seniors in the class of 2005 who, like the seniors before them, remained very uncertain as to what they would do following graduation. To the question of where they might study they said, "We'll prob'ly just end up at Newell..." and to the question of what they might study they responded, "No:::: idea" [PI]. With that, they summed up the feelings of many in the process of choosing colleges and majors from Danville.

The Push of College/The Pull of Country

As the year wore on, I began to wonder, was *anyone* helping students in Danville with the college decision processes? There were a handful of students from the classes of 2004 and 2005 for whom, like Katherine, the decision was methodical, involving only one or two applications and a decision to attend, but for others, going to college seemed, as it had been for Devin, scary, and, well, just plain *hard*. As other researchers had done before me, I looked to the rural deficit as the culprit of the students' floundering. I questioned the role of the teachers and families and others in the community to whom

these students should have been able to turn for guidance. In doing so, however, I was failing to take notice of the agency of decision that the students themselves exercised in shaping their own postsecondary pathways.

The barriers identified in the literature were not insurmountable as posed to students bound for college from Danville. Danville graduates aspired to college at rates similar to students nationwide and were motivated by the encouragement of their families to enroll in pursuit of four-year degrees. As white students, their racial identities were not seen by interview participants as a barrier to postsecondary enrollment or persistence. The economic disadvantages of their rural upbringings served to complicate their academic preparation for college, but, as demonstrated by the inverse relationship of the academic performance of interview participants in college to their placement on the Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence [Table 7.3], neither did this explain the rates of baccalaureate attainment in Danville. Even as their teachers and school administrators grappled with the antinomic functions of education in a rural town, these students had, nonetheless, made their way to college.

Interview participants described their high school guidance counselor as “really helpful” in locating postsecondary scholarship opportunities. In congruence with the grounded survey responses of the class of 2005, they identified their family members as helpful, too. Parents and families assisted to the best of their ability with college admissions forms and financial aid paperwork, participated in college visits and, in some cases, made the decision for their student based on what they believed best, even if it was against their student’s wishes at the time. For instance, Ethan said his Dad had directed him to Newell, because:

...[Ogg State] was too far away for him. He wouldn't like me moving up there... And no Columbus for the first year, 'cause he didn't think going from Danville to Columbus was a smart idea just so- just because I'm not used to being around that many people and everything, so.

In the end, Ethan saw the wisdom of his father's judgment. Of his mother, Devin said, "She didn't want me to go out of state, 'cause she didn't want me- she didn't want me transferring. That's what she didn't want, 'cause that's what my sister did."

The tensions between rurality and college had known the Danville High School as a site of contestation throughout the college decisions process. As our interviews progressed, I realized this same tension was at issue from the point of view of students, as well. Of concern to college and college-bound students from Danville were not any perceived deficiencies of rural culture, barriers to college included, but a strong desire on their part of to remain in relation to their community. These wishes were shared, sometimes as a mandate, by their families. Students and their parents sensed the antinomic relationship between college and rurality and were trying, in some cases desperately, to balance the push of college with the pull of country. As one of the returning teachers said to me, "I tried to go to Oakland my first year, but there weren't enough country kids up there." His first year of college saw him moving back to Danville after just one semester, commuting to TSU Newell for the next two years, and eventually finishing his degree in a house that "a bunch of us from the country" rented at TSU in Columbus [PI].

"My professors know me by my name"

While Danville graduates bound for college might have found uncertainty in the decision processes of postsecondary institution and major, Katherine, Ethan, Devin, Lori,

and Leigh were very firm in their understanding of the type of postsecondary environment they sought: small. In grappling with the antinomy of college and rurality, this was a point in their transition to college that interview participants negotiated very carefully, and which, in Ethan's case, his father negotiated for him. In many ways, it seemed that the students were hoping to find Danville in their college settings. They needed a place where, as Lori put it, they could "fit together."

In the data that follows, it becomes apparent that the issue was more than a matter of fitting in. They needed to be *known*. They needed to be seen. Again drawing on the set of internalized logics that their rural culture had become, the importance of the cultural structures and expressive practices of rurality surfaced in every interview. It became the dominant theme in their college choice processes. Katherine, for instance, knew that she could never survive where no one knew or cared who she was or whether she was at class:

I wanted a small school. Just 'cause I'm used to Danville and I don't think like/ I'm glad I picked a small school cause my friend went to Kerent State²³ and like, to compare our two schools? Their professors have no idea who they are or even if they're at class and like, my professors know me by my name. I just like that personal relationship. And you know more people. Like I know so many people on campus and it's easier - I don't know, just to - - to transition and stuff. The professors are like the teachers here [in Danville]. They're very nice, easy to talk to, get along with, you can always go and talk to them. I just don't like big schools...I think to go from Danville to a big school makes things even harder 'cause nobody- like I said with [my friend], nobody cares that she's at class. They don't think- no idea if she's there or not...

In discussing their choices of small schools, her classmates continued in the vein that Katherine had begun by comparing and contrasting small schools with larger ones.

"Big" colleges and universities were rejected across the board. Like Katherine, Leigh

²³ Pseudonym: Kerent State University, Public university located 2 hours from Danville with an undergraduate enrollment of 30,138

thought it important to go to college in a place where “people actually know you.” She said:

I’m not/ I don’t want to go to main campus, TSU; it’s too big (laughing). I love TSU Newell. It’s small. You’re not just a number. People actually know you. Like, my advisor remembers me when I come talk to her, so it’s really cool. Similar [to Danville] in some ways. Like, the classes are kind of small, which doesn’t usually happen on a bigger campus.

For Lori and Devin below, feeling “comfortable” in their new surroundings was important. They could not imagine living amid the anonymity of a big school like The State University:

Lori: I wanted somewhere small. Like I couldn’t imagine seeing myself at The State University or somewhere like that. I would be so intimidated...I can’t imagine having that many people in a class with me, ‘cause even through high school my classes were small...I couldn’t imagine having a lecture filled with like 600 kids and the professor not knowing you and stuff like that, ‘cause I have always had close contact with my teachers. So I wanted something small where I could just be- feel really comfortable.

Devin: ...The small amount of people. I don’t want/ I mean this is BIG from where I’m from and the people/ I don’t know what they said, three thousand on campus? More or less. But like, yeah, it’s just/ I mean the town, too, the town’s not bad at all either...it’s comfortable...this wasn’t too much of a change to me so I/ I like it. I don’t like the big city. I go to Columbus and it’s like [breathes out] you know, too big for me so. Just like all the driving around and highways, like five lanes that [breathes out] I can’t do that - - -

Devin took his analysis a step further by telling me about a report he was going to write for one of his classes at Gingham. With his next comments, which followed directly from those above, Devin spoke directly to the idea of the rural gaze as it was expounded in Chapter 6:

...and then [in Columbus] too many people, so - - - and they’re rude. There’s another- a report I’m gonna be doin’ here too, rudeness and how all young kids these days, everybody’s rude and then when you go in the big city it’s/ people are more rude because they’re not going to see you the next day and they don’t have to put up with you. Basically in a small town you won’t be rude to a person

because you're going to have to see them the next day.

Having thus portrayed the rural gaze, in which “you won't be rude to a person because you're going to have to see them the next day,” Devin initiated a theme in the college decision process to which other interview respondents spoke, as well. Even as they left for college, they were concerned about being the “good kids” of the principal's observation in Chapter 6. Devin continued, saying he liked the small-town setting of Gingham College, “‘cause not very many people [here at Gingham] are subject to change. Like, you don't want to be changed too much.”

Along with the size of their postsecondary community, the idea of being too much changed by their college experience had become another point of negotiation for the interview respondents in their transition to college. In her choice of a religiously affiliated college in which to enroll, Katherine felt reassured:

I just don't wanna be like one of those people that go to college and like, change, you know. Like change in a bad way. I wanted to stay- like, stay involved in church and keep going to church, because so many people go to college and like, they had been going to church and then they go to college and don't go to church anymore, and it's really important to me like, 'cause I've always grown up going to church, being involved. I was in the youth group and youth choir and so - - - - it's just really important to me and my friends- my roommate was actually Catholic, too, so we go to church every week, so.

The story shared by Lori was on a different topic, but continued with the theme of maintaining her morals and values:

What surprised me the most was...how many girls were still virgins. Like these days like, seriously, like, 16's a good age, you know. That's like it, you know. Like it just shocked me, 'cause I thought I was the only one or something, you know. And I was talking to people and like, we would be like playing those games or whatever and it would come up, you know, and three of my friends that are 19, [one] who was 20 something, so was [another one] who was 20 something. So, I think that just shocked me/

Especially since, “college,” that whole atmosphere of partying and you can sleep with who ever you want, ‘cause that’s what a lot of kids picture college as and like that totally shocked me when I found out things like that. It was a good feeling to know that I wasn’t the only person who had morals and values for myself...

Leigh had heard stories of, “like, kids that have gone to college and just completely do a one-eighty. Like, I think they get out there and like, ‘Oh my gosh!’ you know, ‘Look at all this stuff! Danville doesn’t have this [speaking of illicit drugs, in particular]!’” As for herself, Leigh maintained, “my first sip of alcohol wasn’t until last year,” at the age of 18. She said simply, “I don’t want to drink.”

As the interview respondents storied for me the things that had been important to them in their college decision processes, I became aware of the cultural structures of rurality that stole into their narratives along with the agency of identity the interview participants experienced within those structures. In seeking a small college setting, interview participants were naming as a precondition to their college enrollment a place where their activities might take on the social significance by which they had been defined in Danville. They sought the assurances of self that came from knowing and being known, a place of safety where “someone was always there.” In a sense, they wanted to know that they *existed* there in college, and the way they came into being was in relation to those around them.

A postsecondary institution that, by virtue of its size, held the potential to be a close-knit community of blood, place, or spirit would be worthy of their consideration. A college community with morals and values in line with their own might find these students from Danville inquiring as to their admissions process. Katherine, Ethan, Devin, Lori, and Leigh had heard tell of life outside the rural gaze, and wanted no part of it. On

the whole, they just wanted a “better education” and a “good job” (in or near Danville) when they were through. Across the board, these had been their motivation to pursue a postsecondary education at all.

Danville Football Revisited

In total, the interview participants enrolled in postsecondary institutions with an undergraduate population of 2,200 or less. Despite the design of their college choices, however, these first-year college students found themselves back in Danville every weekend of their first college term. They were part of a long standing tradition in Danville which saw the return of the previous year’s graduating class each Friday night of the season to participate in the expressive culture of place that was Danville football. Every year and at every game, the returning class sat in the bleachers of the Division VI Mid-Buckeye Conference, breathing in the ethos of who they were. Of this tradition, Leigh said:

That’s Danville! Everyone else out of high school is like, ‘Oh, that’s so stupid.’ I’m like, ‘That’s what you DO in Danville!’ That’s what/ Like, kids that graduated 5 years ago wear their jerseys, you know? And it- it- it’s just Danville. I love/ Like, I missed the first football game of the season [this year]. It KILLED me. ...but, yeah, it’s what everyone does. You go back (laughs then stops). - - - It’s so weird, but you just do.

There was more to their return to Danville than watching a football game. Many of them could (and did) do that at the colleges and universities where they were enrolled. For the rural students in this study, it was impossible to conceptualize the self as separate from the community of Danville. They came back each week seeking reaffirmation of who they were. Interviews would frequently trail off, as Leigh’s had above, into pauses of reverie while participants considered the reasons they came home almost every

weekend during their first college term, and, in many cases, their entire first year of college. In one historical narrative, it was summed up like this, “Exactly, the sense of community. It was. It was getting back to that. Which I didn’t feel there [at college]...” [PIII-1-1].

Based on the interview data from this group of first-year college students, I would add that it was more than a “sense of community” that they were in search of when college students from Danville came home. It was a *sense of self* with which they were coming back in touch. In the grand stands of northeast Ohio, they found assurance not only of who they were, but *that* they were. They were known.

Languishing in College

One of my astonishments in this study was to hear interview participants speak of a certain listlessness that had set in during their first year of college. Having seen them at football games and in town, this description of themselves was incongruent with my observations. In my perception, they were young, vibrant, healthy kids, cheering at football games and holding hands with their dates at the pizza parlor. If I had had any expectation, it would have been that they would feel overwhelmed in college, but what they described to me was near boredom in their first year of postsecondary study. I noted in their accounts a lack of activity that was nearly complete:

Katherine: Last year [in high school] I was really busy, because I was the president of so many organizations and like, there’s so much planning to do with prom and graduation and like, just different stuff umm, so, I had all that to do. So I was really really busy last year. Like, never had time to do anything. But this year it’s not like that. Like I go to class and, I work on campus, so I go to work a couple hours, and then just come back to my room hang out...

Ethan: ...it was amazing how boring days went when you couldn’t do nothing...

Devin: Yep. Like me I just/ I lift all the time, that's all I do. I do school, lift, baseball; school, lift, baseball, every day.

Lori: There wasn't much else to do, to be honest... So I was home every weekend I could be home.

Leigh: When I first started college I was nuts. I was so used to being on the go 24/7 all the time. I was involved in everything in high school and all of a sudden I'm like ' - - - I'm working - - - and I'm going to school - - - okay - - - What am I gonna do?' I'm used to sleeping a lot now! I sleep all the time (laughs). I'm like, 'hfff, I used to never sleep,' but now I just sleep. Anytime I'm home. I'm asleep on the couch usually.

What the interview participants were describing was a languishing of their core sense of self, which was becoming unanimated in their college surroundings. In most cases, the life assurances they had asked of their college settings had not materialized. Their college professors and advisors may have recognized them, but they didn't *really* know them. Outside of the rural gaze and among people to whom their core self was unknown, the activities that had been imbued with meaning in Danville lost their significance. Going to college became a not-so-metaphorical contest against themselves to see if they could survive the week until they or, in Ethan and Leigh's cases, their friends could return. College students from Danville came back to Danville football games (and the Raccoon Dinner, and Prom, and Church...) to find their core senses of self reanimated *in community*, the rural community in and with which they were identified.

Coming Home: The Antinomy in Resolution

In the end, the first-year college student participants resolved the antinomy of rurality and college by remaining in relation to their community. The ways they chose to do so held implications for their postsecondary persistence. In linking the accounts of

Katherine, Ethan, Devin, Lori, and Leigh to their placement on the Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence [Table 7.3], the difference from one end of the continuum to the other was the extent to which they experienced life in college as integrated with life in Danville. Their involvement in each community became the integrating agent of the two. This integration refers not to a set of psychological schemata as in Elliott's (1989) original investigation, but to the tangible experiences of students.

Through their levels of involvement in each setting, interview participants experienced life in college and life in Danville as highly integrated or disintegrated. For example, to the extent that she remained highly involved in Danville and in her college setting, Katherine persisted to her second year of study in pursuit of the four-year degree of her initial interest at the institution of her initial enrollment. Katherine's description of her experience is represented by Figure 7.1, in which the square labeled *Danville* represents the Danville community, the Square labeled *College* represents the college community, and the circle represents Katherine. The placement of the squares represents the degree of integration Katherine experienced between life in Danville and life in college and the placement of the circle represents her high level of involvement in both settings simultaneously.

In Katherine's description of her experience, life in college was highly integrated with life in Danville, so much so that her postsecondary experience seemed an extension of her life in Danville rather than separate from it. She lived on campus at Waller, but came home on the weekends and for summer vacation, sometimes bringing friends from Waller with her. She also spoke of friends from Danville visiting her at Waller that first

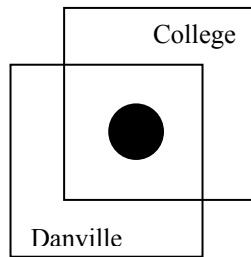


Figure 7.1: Continuous Persistence: Katherine - Levels of Involvement were high in both settings simultaneously and Life in Danville and Life in College were seen as Highly Integrated

year. As Katherine's earlier narrative revealed, going to church was something that remained very important to her, and she would do so at Waller and in Danville throughout her first year of college, depending on where she happened to be at the time.

While she remained highly involved in the community of Danville, Katherine also became highly involved at Waller, where she was involved in campus ministries and a club for students who shared her major. Katherine had been encouraged to apply to become a resident assistant during her sophomore year, and named her own resident assistant as a major source of both academic and emotional support while she had struggled through her first year at Waller. That being said, she also came back to Danville and sought the advice of her high school teachers when preparing for college exams. In fact, the first time I met Katherine was when she approached the science teacher at a football game to ask if she could come to the school to "study the articulation

of joints” on the skeleton they had used in Anatomy the year before.

During our interview, Katherine spoke with excitement about friends from Danville’s Class of 2005 who would be attending Waller in the fall. One was the daughter of her mother’s best friend whose boyfriend would also be enrolling at Waller and playing football come autumn. Through her high levels of involvement in both settings, life in college had become highly integrated with life in Danville during Katherine’s first year of postsecondary study.

To the extent that their levels of involvement grew uneven from one setting to the other, Ethan and Devin experienced life in college and life in Danville as fairly distinct from one another and, therefore, only slightly integrated. This is represented by the placement of the squares representing Danville and College in Figure 7.2, where the degree of overlap between the squares is less than in Figure 7.1. The placement of the circles in relation to the squares represents their levels of involvement in each setting. Ethan was highly involved in Danville and less so in College. Devin was more highly involved in College and less so in Danville. This posed a scenario in which Ethan and Devin experienced life in Danville and life in college as less integrated than did Katherine, who was highly involved in both Danville and her college setting.

When there was a lack of integration between the two settings and interview participants felt their involvement in Danville threatened, they would always adjust their involvement levels in favor of Danville. By virtue of living in Danville and commuting to Newell, Ethan had naturally remained highly involved in the Danville community. His level of involvement in the college setting came primarily through his job as a security guard on campus, but he, “quit there right before Chri/ well more on Christmas break,

because they were putting me on Friday and Saturday nights and that's when I got to see

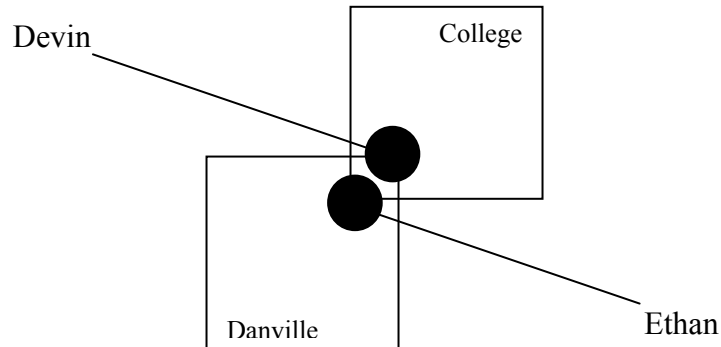


Figure 7.2: Modified Persistence: Ethan and Devin - Level of Involvement was unequal from setting to setting and Life in Danville and Life in College were seen as less integrated

all my friends when they were home from college, and I didn't really like that too well...," he said. When his involvement in his college setting threatened to impede his involvement in the Danville community, Ethan adjusted accordingly, thereby limiting his involvement in his college settings to participation in classes and the few friends with whom he might interact before or after class.

Devin, because he lived on campus, was more highly involved at Gingham than he was in Danville, though there remained a certain amount of integration between life in college and life in Danville. Devin's participation in college sports had helped ease his transition to college and his roommate, a sophomore at Gingham, was also a graduate of Danville High School. Gingham was 90 minutes from Danville, which limited his

involvement in the Danville community to weekend visits. His second year of college would find Devin modifying his postsecondary persistence pattern to facilitate his increased involvement in Danville.

To the extent that student involvement grew further imbalanced from one setting to the other, students experienced life in college as disintegrated from life in Danville. This left Lori, who was highly involved in college and less so in Danville, further from continuous persistence and Leigh, who was highly involved in Danville and not at all so in college, in the position of nonpersistence in college. Lori and Leigh's experiences are represented in Figure 7.3 where the degree of overlap between the square representing Danville and the square representing College symbolizes their description of the degree to which they experienced life in college as integrated with life in Danville. The placement of the circles, with the addition of the bi-directional arrows, represents their levels of involvement in each setting, Lori from college and Leigh from Danville. The arrows symbolize their efforts to remain involved in both settings even though they were operating predominantly from one or the other.

Because Evans University was 3 hours from Danville, Lori found it difficult to maintain her involvement in the Danville community. When her involvement in college expanded at the expense of her involvement in Danville, she withdrew from the four-year institution of her first year of study and enrolled in a two-year institution to which she would commute from Danville.

Leigh remained highly involved in Danville, where she lived throughout her first year of study, but she was completely uninvolved in college except for the classes to which she commuted. She said:

‘Cause I don’t like to drive all the way back out to Newell, that- like, there’s clubs and stuff that I would love to do, but no desire to drive another 45 minutes and gas and stuff, so like, I’m not involved in anything. This quarter it’s almost over,

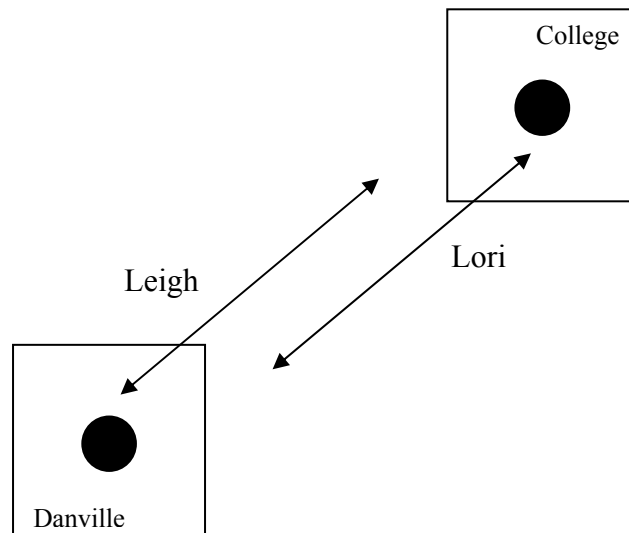


Figure 7.3: Nonpersistence: Lori and Leigh - Levels of Involvement were very high in one setting and very low in the other and Life in Danville and Life in College were seen as disintegrated

but I’d kinda like to start hanging out with different people that are closer [to Danville] and stuff.

A visual representation of these findings as they relate to the patterns of postsecondary persistence of the interview participants can be found in Table 7.4, where Figures 1, 2, and 3 (above) are placed along the Revised Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence according to the position of the interview participants whose experiences they symbolize. For example, Katherine occupied Position 1 on the Revised Continuum. Thus, Figure 7.1 occupies a place nearer that end of the continuum because

it symbolizes Katherine's experience of life in college and life in Danville as highly integrated through her high levels of involvement in each setting. Figure 7.2, symbolizing Ethan and Devin's experiences of involvement and integration, is placed toward the middle of the continuum nearer to the positions they occupied on the Revised Continuum. The figure representing Lori and Leigh's experiences of involvement and integration [Figure 7.3] is placed nearest to the positions Lori and Leigh occupied on the Revised Continuum.

Patterns of Postsecondary Persistence:

Implications for Student Involvement

The findings regarding postsecondary persistence, involvement, and the integration of life in college with life in Danville are, in part, consistent with the hypotheses of Involvement Theory (Astin, 1977, 1999). This theory, now widely applied and considered foundational to student affairs practice, suggests that student involvement in college has a positive impact on student development and retention at the postsecondary level. In essence, the more involved the student in college, the more likely the student is to succeed in college. In addition, student involvement theory indicates that the quantity and quality of student involvement contributes to overall levels of student satisfaction with their college experience.

The tenets of student involvement certainly proved true in the instances of Katherine and Lori, who were both highly involved in their college settings and who, despite the differences in their academic performance, each found great satisfaction their first-year college experiences. What was also true, however, was that the patterns of postsecondary persistence for Katherine and Lori corresponded with their levels of

involvement in *both* college *and* Danville.

Considering the data as it is represented in Table 7.4, Katherine was the only

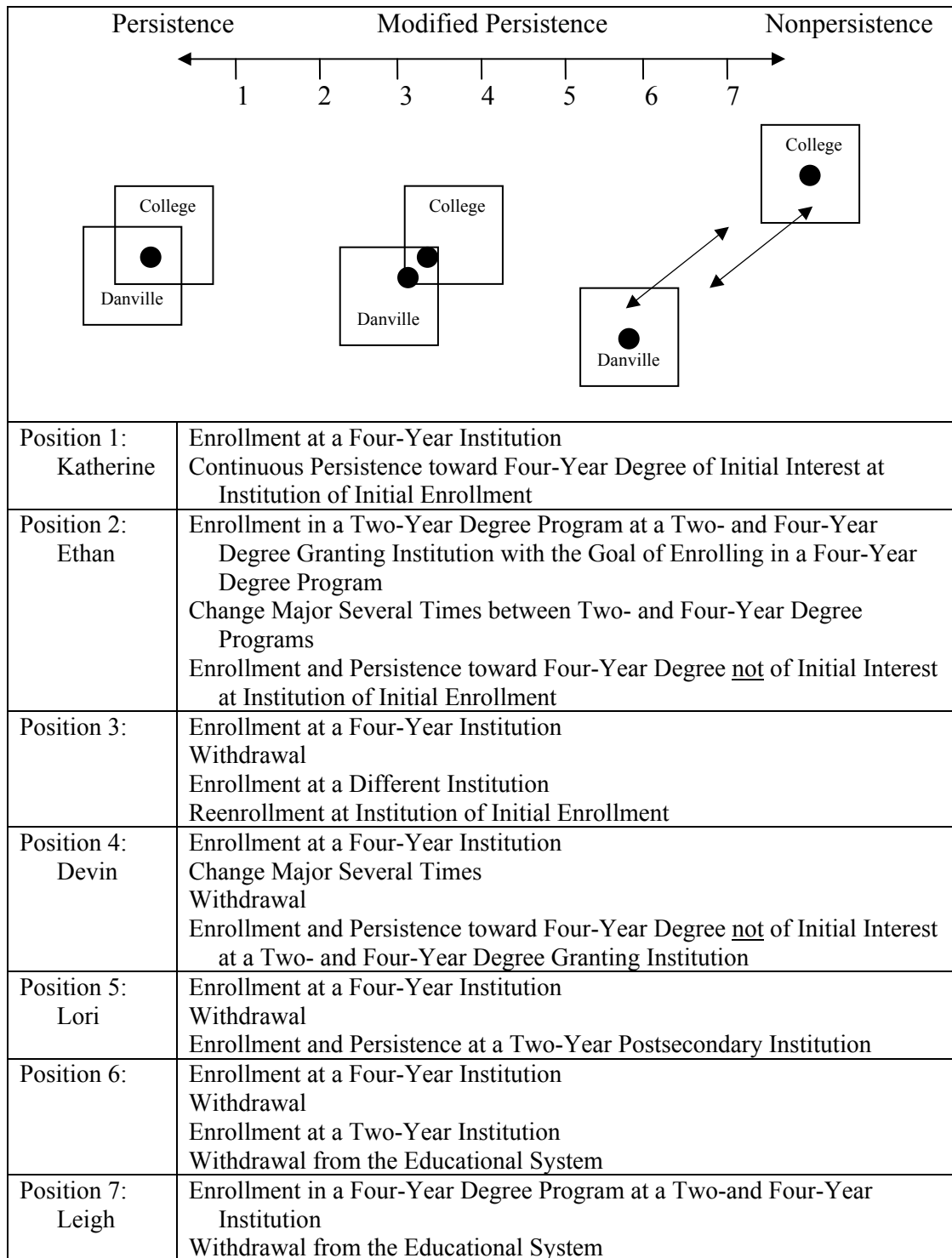


Table 7.4 Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence from First to Second Year of College for Five First-Year College Students from Danville

student to maintain high levels of involvement in both college and Danville, and the only interview participant to persist continuously at the postsecondary level. For Ethan and Devin, their involvement was higher in one setting than the other, and their placement on the Continuum of Postsecondary Persistence/Nonpersistence reflects this imbalance according to their level of involvement in Danville. As the imbalance between their involvement in both the college and the Danville settings grew, Lori and Leigh became less likely to persist in their pursuit of four-year degrees.

It is important to note that the key to postsecondary persistence was not in relation to Danville alone, but seemed to lie in the *balance* of student involvement in both settings. In Leigh's case, for example, she was involved in Danville to the exclusion of TSU Newell and this did not bode well for her persistence in college. The further from continuous persistence in the programs of their initial interest at the institutions of their initial enrollment, the more lopsided (if you will) their involvement and the less integrated their experiences.

These assertions, of course, cannot be generalized based on the ethnographic data of one study such as this. However, these hypotheses may warrant further investigation, for they pose a challenge to the typical adaptation of Involvement Theory in higher education. While involvement in college does seem to have had an impact on the first-year college experiences of this handful of students from Danville, it appears it may tell only half the story. The data here suggest that college students from places like Danville may require high levels of involvement in *both* the college setting *and* their rural communities in order to succeed in their postsecondary endeavors.

Summary

The school context has been found exceedingly influential in shaping the college choices of high school graduates (McDonough, 1997) and the lack of emphasis on college entrance during high school became a significant barrier set at the beginning of the postsecondary pathways of students bound for college from Danville. Yet, this chapter saw students from Danville enrolled in college at rates similar to those nationally, thus overcoming this and other barriers to higher education that have previously been identified by research on rural students. Given this state of affairs, this chapter sought a cultural explanation as to the postsecondary persistence and nonpersistence patterns of students from Danville, and found it in their rural identities.

The chapter saw college and college-bound students from Danville contending with the antinomy of rurality and college as it manifested along the pathways of their postsecondary lives, and it found them not only “choosing college,” but choosing Danville in resolution of the antinomy. Drawing on the local logics of rurality, choosing Danville took on a rationality that had a direct impact on their patterns of postsecondary persistence. For Katherine, Ethan, Devin, Lori, and Leigh, this choice seemed a matter of survival as their core senses of self seemed to languish in college. For some, choosing Danville required modification of their pattern of postsecondary persistence. For others, it resulted in withdrawal from higher education altogether. Either way, college-going in Danville proved *going* a far more fluid process than is typically conceptualized in college student research. Ultimately, the agency exercised by students in choosing *both* college *and* Danville may hold implications for Involvement Theory as it has been developed over the years since its inception (Astin, 1999).

In concluding this chapter, I enclose a portion of Lori's narrative as an illumination of the antinomic struggles of higher education for college students from Danville and its resolution in coming home. Her college of choice had been Evans University, which was located in a community smaller in size than Danville. Recall that she would withdraw from Evans to live with her family and commute to the community college in Newell so that she might become a nurse:

I wasn't shocked or anything. It felt normal when I looked out and saw farms and hayfields and stuff so I felt like I was at home, yet – not – quite. I don't know, it's weird. Something just didn't fit together.

I made great friends. Yeah I did good. I enjoyed the whole year. I really had some good support down there. I had my girls with me, 'cause I was on the team. Like my four friends I hung out with, we got very, very close and I guess they felt like my sisters just 'cause I was with them all the time. Coach was like our Dad, you know. So I had all of them and there's one girl especially. She's a junior there and she plays basketball too and she just was like, 'I know what you're going through' 'cause she lives down there but she had gone to Kerent State before and she's the same way I am. She missed home so much, so we kind of had stuff in common and she really helped me. She's like, you know, 'If you need to feel like you're at home, get some good home cooking you know you can come to my house and chill with my family,' but it just wasn't the same.

Yeah, I cried a lot. You know, I got homesick, 'cause it's 3 hours away from here. It's just/ there's just something about... I don't know if it was rather because I was so far away from home or there was just something about it where I was like, this isn't/ I experienced new things, but I just didn't see myself being there for another three years. I just – I missed home a lot more than I thought I would... Like that surprised me 'cause I didn't think/ but I ended up missing it. I was thinking I'd be like, 'Yes! I'm out of the house. I'm at COLLEGE,' you know. I went to maybe one party and [shrugs, like she wasn't impressed], you know. Home was a very important factor. You can't replace home.

Like everybody knew each other down there, 'cause it's so small and you always had a friend if you needed one... So I had that too, but I guess it's just never the same... I guess that just takes time to get to know people..., more than a year. So I guess that was the difference... No history... I think it's nice to have history with people 'cause like know matter where you go you always know you have some place to come back to and you'll have someone who knows you, the *real* you, who loves you and will support you no matter what and you always

have a place to go. And that is just a very nice feeling to have.

CHAPTER 8

IN CONCLUSION

This dissertation sought to shed light on cultural processes that shape the identities and postsecondary pathways of college students from rural areas. The ethnographic account herein describes the cultural structures and practices of identification that served to constitute rural subjectivities (or core senses of self) in the town of Danville, Ohio. It further details the ways in which rurality, as comprised of culture and identity, was employed and deployed by students bound for college from Danville High School as they determined their patterns of postsecondary persistence.

Studying Rurality

As an ethnography, this study was grounded in constructivist methodologies in its assumptions of multiple truths, co-created understandings, and naturalistic methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a, p. 21). This research maintained that the broad, quantitative brush strokes with which the postsecondary pathways and experiences of college students from rural areas were previously articulated were insufficient for understanding the role of rural culture in the lives of college students from rural areas. A longer-term and in-depth ethnographic approach was undertaken in order to explore the complexity of rural culture and the educational decisions of rural students and their families.

Broadly considered, this dissertation describes an investigation into the postsecondary pathways of college and college-bound students from a rural town. Premised on the idea that research on college student development might be enhanced by an understanding of the cultural locations from whence students arrive, this thesis includes an analysis cultural production and reproduction in Danville, Ohio (Levinson et al., 1996; Willis, 1977). Imagining identity a palimpsest of lived experience rather than a reified notion that might be at any moment traded for another in the global marketplace, this research demonstrates my attempt to bring a cultural studies perspective to the body of literature that informs current understandings of college student development.

The analyses of data here provide “an examination of how the history people live is produced by structures that have been handed down from the past” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b, p. 161), but the study was also concerned with the practices and processes of identification within a contextualized system of meaning (Holland & Lave, 2001). Rurality, I found, was deeply layered in structures and meaning, “...not only a product or set of attributes that [could] be claimed and neatly recorded, but more significantly, a process that [was] ongoing” (Yon, 2000, p. 5).

The presentation of data is framed in discourses of rurality delineated by landscape, culture, and postmodern theory (Pratt, 1996). While the town of Danville met rural definitions of the empiricist perspective, the modern rural of Danville was bounded also by the expressive culture that existed there (Foley, 1994). While scholars of the postmodern assert the decline of the local, rural scholars discuss the difficulties of maintaining a sense of community in the face of globalizing economies, industries, and educational systems (Brysk, 2003; Edmondson, 2003; Hall, 1999; Hobbs, 1994; Luloff

& Krannich, 2002). Meanwhile, rural culture as it existed in history and practice was one of the few things by which Danville identified and could be identified as rural.

This ethnographic account brings to light the cultural structures of the modern rural as they were lived through practices of family, place, and spirit in Danville (Tonnie, 2001/1887). The analyses of data illustrate the implications of rural culture for the development of identity, college decisions processes, and patterns of postsecondary persistence for research participants. In Danville, rurality became not only the system of meaning with which people made sense of the world, but, importantly, it was the system of meaning with which those bound for college made sense of themselves.

Findings in Relation to the First Set of Research Questions

Presented in very broad, quantitative terms, the greater part of the extant literature fell short in its understanding that the higher educational aspirations, enrollment, and persistence of college students from rural areas can not be understood separately from rural culture. Accordingly, this research was driven by an interest in identifying the ways in which the postsecondary choices and experiences of college students from the rural town of Danville were mediated by their rural histories, how these histories remained at play in the educational pathways of those who transitioned to higher education from high school, and the interplay between the rural background of college students from Danville and identity development processes. Seeking a balance between cultural structures and the meaning made of lived experiences, fieldwork and interviews centered on questions of culture as they related to college aspirations, college preparation, and barriers and supports in college enrollment and persistence:

- How were participants motivated (or not motivated) in this rural environment to

enroll and persist in postsecondary environments?

- What were the barriers or supports to enrollment and persistence in higher education, in both the home community and the college or university setting?
- How were participants prepared to make the necessary adjustments to college or university life prior to enrollment? How did processes of adaptation continue to take shape on campus?

In the review of research presented in Chapter 2, matters of economy, first-generation student status, familial support, and race are identified as barriers to the enrollment and persistence of rural students in college (Aylesworth & Bloom, 1976; Beeson & Strange, 2003; Day-Perroots, 1992; Feller, 1974; Greenberg & Teixeira, 1998; Parsons, 1992; Schutz, 2003; M. H. Smith, 1995; Tharpe, 1997; Wenstrom, 1981; Yan, 2002). The research reviewed indicated that rural students were less likely than their urban and suburban counterparts to enroll in postsecondary institutions with intentions of obtaining a bachelor's degree (DeYoung, 1994; Hu, 2003; Marine, 1996; Yan, 2002; Young, 2002). For rural students who did enroll, few were likely to persist to achieve their degree (DeYoung, 1994; Elliott, 1989; Feller, 1974; R. Gibbs, 1998; Yan, 2002; Young, 2002). According to the latest statistics, while high school graduates nationwide have been enrolled in college at rates of more than 45 percent in recent years ("The 2005-2006 Almanac," 2006, p. 14), degree attainment in rural areas has remained at just 15.5 percent (R. Gibbs, 2003, p. 1).

Some of the research reviewed took this lack of educational attainment as a sign that rural students have lower educational aspirations than their peers in other settings (Cowley et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 1999; Khattri et al., 1997; Lee & McIntire, 1999;

Paasch & Swaim, 1995; Young, 2002). In Danville, the rate at which high school graduates intended to pursue a four-year college degree ranged as high as 43 percent over a ten-year period beginning with 1996, indicating that students from Danville did, in fact, aspire to a four-year degree at rates similar to high school graduates nationwide. However, just 11.3 percent of adults in Danville held a bachelor's degree and of the class under consideration in this research, only 13 percent enrolled and persisted to their second year of study at the colleges and programs of initial registration.

Barriers and Supports in College Enrollment and Persistence

The barriers and supports in college enrollment for students from Danville were very much congruent with those identified in the literature. As previously noted, there is a racial distinction between rural areas of the northern United States and those in the southern United States, with rural students from the South much more likely to be African American and students from the North more likely to be European American. The population of Danville (Beeson & Strange, 2003; DeYoung, 1994; R. M. Gibbs et al., 1998) was highly reflective of rural populations in the northern United States in that it was largely white and the racial identities of students bound for college from Danville were not interpreted as a barrier to postsecondary enrollment or persistence.

The review of research notes parental and family expectations as the most powerful predictor of college attendance for rural students (Day-Perroots, 1992; Parsons, 1992; Schutz, 2003; M. H. Smith, 1995; Tharpe, 1997; Wenstrom, 1981; Yan, 2002), and interview respondents from Danville's Class of 2004 all indicated a high expectation on the part of their families that they attend college. Taking into consideration the lack of college preparedness these students experienced, the expectations of their families may

well have been the only thing impelling them toward a four-year degree.

The financial constraints that accompanied the college-going process were most notable in the Danville community and school as opposed to individual students obtaining funding for college. The college-going participants were able to piece together the necessary funds for college; however, from the perspectives of their first year in college, interview respondents felt the pinch of the rural economy as a lack of educational resources they now recognized in their school district. This included a lack of resources with which to conduct biology and chemistry experiments, funding for textbooks, a lack of course offerings during their senior year of high school, and no college entrance exam preparation. Looking back, those in college felt the economic impact of their rural poor school district as they faced the academic rigor of college.

Along with the noted lack of educational resources, students bound for college from Danville were also faced with a school and community struggling with the antinomy of educational functions in a rural community (Bruner, 1996). This antinomy translated into a certain ambivalence toward college preparation on the part of the school. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the school and the students were instrumental in the reproduction of the rural culture in which they were sustained. To enable those who aspired to college to use their “wits, skills, and passions to the fullest” (Bruner, 1996, p. 67) meant to prepare them to do so elsewhere.

As it was so closely entwined with the community and the identity of the town, it was difficult to imagine Danville High School educating its students *out* of Danville. In terms of preparing to make the necessary adjustments to college or university life, students were left very much to the means of themselves and their families. Again

drawing on the grounded survey administered to the graduates of 2005, of the 13 respondents who indicated on the survey that they would be enrolling in a bachelor's degree program, none indicated that the Guidance Counselor or Principal had been helpful in this decision, while only four indicated that a teacher had been helpful to them in deciding what they would do after graduating. This was a grounded survey, and, therefore, not constructed in accordance with the principles of generalization, however these numbers do speak to the uncertainty with which school teachers and administrators in Danville approached the role of helping students prepare for their adjustment to college.

Findings in Relation to the Second Set of Research Questions

From among the cognitive, psychosocial, typological, and environmental themes most common to student development theory, the development of identity has been asserted as the major developmental tasks for college students (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, 2003; Evans et al., 1998; Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Kegan, 1994; McEwen, 2003). While these models of identity inform our understanding of college student development within broad sociocultural frameworks and historical backdrops, (see Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, 2003; Komives et al., 2003), they leave the theorized individual unbound in time, place, or community. Among these theories, the relational aspects of identity development processes have been left undocumented and there has been little consideration of the ways in which identity is contextually bound.

This study offers a cultural perspective on identity development processes, arguing the importance of place in addition to time in the development of self. In so

doing, the implications of the structures and practices of rural culture have been examined in relation to the development of identity among college-bound and college students from Danville. A second set of research questions centered on student identities and the perceptions students held of themselves in relation to their home community and, in turn, to the college or university setting. How did they go about fitting in...or did they?

- How did participants negotiate the transition to college or university life?
- How did their perceptions and experiences of the practices and people in their midst link to the self-definitions and sense of identity they experienced? How did these definitions change over time?
- In the end, what role did their educational experiences play in shaping any enduring sense of themselves as “rural”? How did participants adapt, resist, reconfigure the social construction of their rural subjectivities?

Chapter 5 saw the exposition of rurality as it was identified through empiricist, cultural, and poststructural discourses of “the rural” (Pratt, 1996). The practices of identification with which people in Danville identified as rural were subsequently discussed and Chapter 6 expounded the ways in which these cultural structures and practices were appropriated in the construction of the core senses of self experienced by students in Danville. In light of this rural culture and these rural identities, college-bound students negotiated their transition to college or university life.

Guided by very little other than the rural culture that had brought them into the world, the first-year college student participants negotiated their transition to higher education very carefully. Due to the limitations of the context for college decisions in

Danville, the processes of choosing a postsecondary institution and major were ill-defined, fraught with fear and uncertainty. Of the type of college environment sought, however, research participants were certain.

In choosing colleges and universities which were small in size, interview participants in their first year of college anticipated college experiences that would mirror the expressive culture of rurality. They sought college communities where their professors would know them by name and they would be remembered by their advisors. They qualified postsecondary enrollment with the condition that they would not be too much changed upon completion of their postsecondary degrees. To these ends, they chose small colleges or universities for their potential as closely knit communities of family, place, or spirit as they had come to understand these rural markers in Danville. They sought the assurances of a community whose values and morals were congruent with their own and, above all, the assurances of self that came through the rural gaze – knowing and being known.

Despite these careful negotiations, students sensed their core selves growing quiet in their college environments as the assurances they had so carefully negotiated failed to materialize in their college settings. Consequently, their postsecondary pathways were shaped by their attempts to reanimate the self, a process which lead them back to the place with and by which they were identified. In their return to Danville, these first-year college students pointedly resisted any reconfiguration of their rural subjectivities, for Danville was at the core of who they were.

Though ethnography may not be generalized, through measures of transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) the interpretations of data here serve to complicate concepts like

culture and *identity* in higher education. This ethnography describes rurality as it provides an in-depth discussion of this key concept brought to push current thinking on college student development. The assumption that student development begins and ends with the student's arrival and departure from higher education is challenged in this account with questions of where culture is located and when identity begins. Though the answers to these questions are not unambiguous, the data here suggest that rural culture was internalized as a core sense of self and rural identities were in process long before college-bound students left Danville.

Rurality: At issue for Danville

At the conclusion of this dissertation, I am not prepared to argue that a baccalaureate education is the best or most appropriate choice for every rural student. However, in acknowledging that college aspirations in Danville were on par with those of students nationwide, I am prepared to argue that, for those students who do intend to pursue a four-year postsecondary degree, the context for college choice is in need of attention from both the school and the community of Danville.

In the high school, this would require further emphasis on college preparation, consisting of a focus on both college entrance and college decisions processes to include choices of postsecondary institution and major. Considering the responses to the grounded survey administered to the Danville Class of 2005, if a similar survey were to be administered in the future, a reasonable goal might be to see college-bound students naming not only their families, but the principal, the guidance counselor, and every teacher with whom they come into contact as helpful in preparing them for college.

College preparation might also include a curricular focus on college entrance

exams. In Danville specifically, this might take the form of ACT tutoring offered to students interested in pursuing a four-year college degree. Perhaps it could be offered during the mid-day activity periods in the same way that OGT tutoring has been scheduled in the past. Recognizing the risks of academic failure and early withdrawal they face as rural students in college, the importance of enhancing the context for college preparation cannot be overstated for students intending to enroll in four-year colleges from Danville.

To further emphasize the importance of strengthening the context for college decisions, this context has been directly linked to patterns of postsecondary persistence. At no time during the collection of data was there mention of the elite or highly selective institutions to which college-bound students from Danville might aspire in the highly stratified U.S. system of higher education. This was true of students, school administrators and teachers, as well as community members. Only one parent in the course of this study made the delineation of a “fine institution” for her college-bound senior [PI]. This does not bode well for patterns of postsecondary persistence in Danville, because:

...the college one attends significantly affects one’s chances of completing the baccalaureate, and ...the proportions of students who persist until they graduate vary widely across institutions, even after academic ability is controlled (Velez 1985). Elite institutions have graduation rates of between 85 percent and 95 percent. Four-year public institutions have much lower rates, approximately 45 percent (Snyder 1987). ...baccalaureate degree completion rates for those students who begin at community colleges are even lower (Brint and Karabel

1989). (McDonough, 1997, p. 3)

Despite their best efforts in persisting from their first to their second year of college, the outlook for their persistence to degree might still have been bleak for Katherine, Ethan, Devin, and perhaps even Lori, now in pursuit of a two-year degree. An emphasis on college preparation could only increase the likelihood of postsecondary persistence for those to follow.

Because of the uniquely intimate nature of the relationship between rural schools and their communities, the Danville community may also serve along with the high school as an evoking mechanism for students in the college-going process. Therefore, an emphasis on college-going in the community might prove useful to students bound for college. As seen in Chapter 6, student behavior in Danville is very much gauged in relation to their community. Interview participants indicated that this would continue to be the case upon attainment of their degrees. Therefore, increasing the social relevance of a postsecondary education to the community may be of assistance to college-bound and college students in the community.

In particular, this shift in the context for college-going in Danville might come simply through community members – parents, teachers, clergy – including college in their discussions with college-bound or college students. Although this was not discussed in the presentation of data, it was noted by first-year college students during our interviews that they did not talk very much with people in Danville about life in college. Recognizing the hypothesized positive relationship between patterns of postsecondary persistence and high levels of integration between life in college and life in Danville, community members should know that these discussions need not focus on

the specifics of college academics, but on the students' involvement in college (e.g. "How are you doing in college? Are you getting involved with things on campus? Keeping your grades up?").

As well, in terms of assisting students with their postsecondary transitions and patterns of persistence, it might be helpful for the Danville community to keep in mind the findings of this research, specifically those of Chapter 7 with regard to student involvement. The experiences of the first-year college student participants suggested that continuous persistence in college may depend on high levels of involvement in *both* Danville *and* their college communities. As concerned community members become aware of their students' involvement becoming imbalanced between Danville and the college setting, they might bring this observation to the attention of the student and discuss possible remedies for bringing their involvement into balance.

Rurality: At Issue for College Student Development

Also in recognition of the findings regarding involvement, integration of settings, and postsecondary persistence of Chapter 7, I issue the call to higher education and student affairs to assist students in facilitating the integration of the college setting and their rural communities through student involvement in both. In my experience, the tenets of Involvement Theory (Astin, 1999) are often adopted by student affairs professionals in an effort to facilitate student involvement on campus with specific discouragements for involvement in their home communities. In light of the finding that high involvement in both settings seemed facilitative of postsecondary persistence for the first-year participants in this study, student affairs professionals might follow the same course recommended above for the community of Danville (e.g. Have you been home

lately? How is your family doing? Are they planning on coming for family weekend?
[visiting days often scheduled on college campuses].)

In addition, this study again provides an opportunity to reconsider student development theory from a standpoint that identifies *place* as a key element in processes of student development. The analyses of data concentrated on the construction of identity as a relational act in both the rural setting and the college or university setting. It centered cultural production and reproduction as important concepts in seeking to understand how student identities are forged within and against the extant structures of specified sites (Levinson et al., 1996).

The data analysis found in Chapter 6 began to elaborate the theory of the *Model of Multiple Identity Dimensions (MMDI)* (Jones & McEwen, 2000) in demonstrating how the rural context was experienced in Danville as a core sense of self. These findings suggest that the model might be redrawn to include cultural processes which served to constitute cores senses of self as they were expressed by college and college-bound students of Danville. The model in its new configuration is illustrated by Figure 8.1.

This reconceptualization of the *MMDI* (as adapted from Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 407) is intended to illustrate the ways in which rural students from Danville appropriated their rural culture in the production of a core sense of self. The arrows flowing in both directions – from the context to the core and back again – represent the ways in which the individual was at once produced by and producing of their context.

As an addition to the *MMDI*, what I have called “cultural process arrows” are also intended to represent how context shapes perceptions of social identity. In other words, through the processes represented by these arrows, the context that informs one’s core

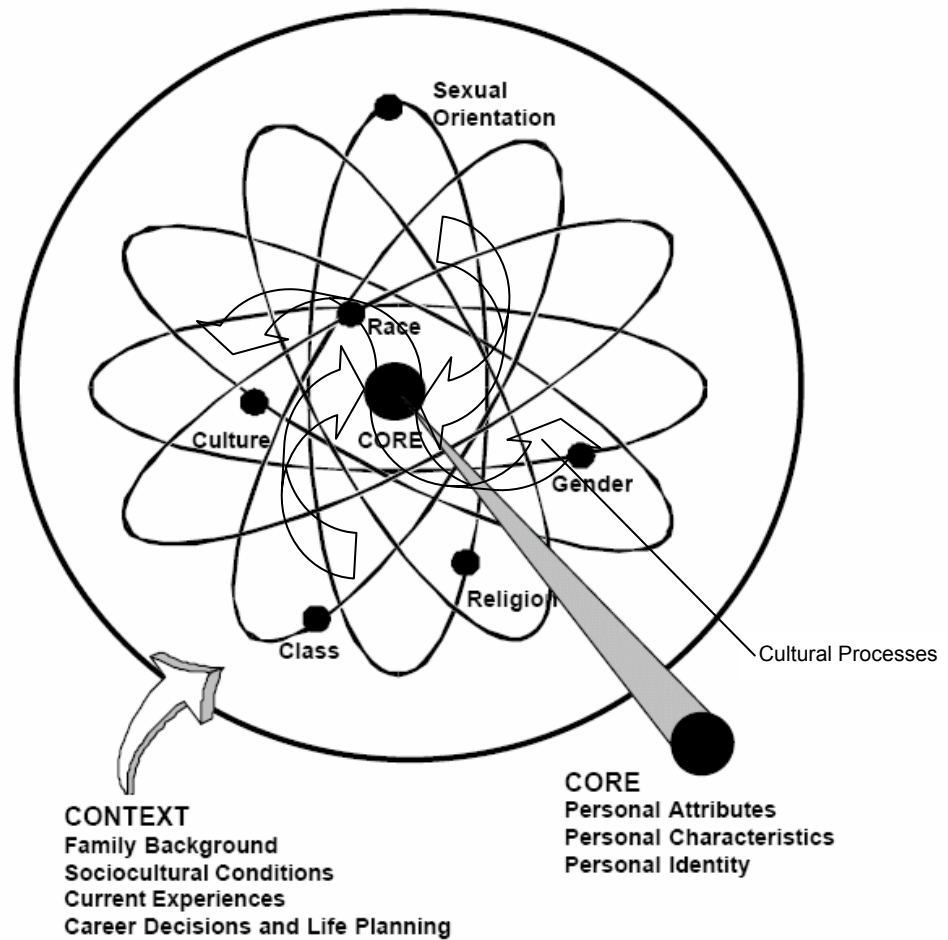


Figure 6.1: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity – Redrawn (as adapted from Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 407)

sense of self also informs our perceptions of social identities – those of others as well as our own. As an illustration, if you will, imagine yourself standing in the context of the *MMDI* looking in at the intersecting circles of the multiple dimensions of identity. Now,

imagine yourself standing at the core of the *MMDI* looking out at those same identity dimensions. In light of the ways that the context informs the development of the core through culture, I hypothesize that one's perception of social identity dimensions might shift depending upon the accessible context appropriated in the development of the core self. While Jones and McEwen (Jones & McEwen, 2000) placed these developmental processes in very broad sociocultural contexts, I argue that these processes of development are also locally contingent.

The redrawn representation of multiple identity dimensions is more consistent with processes of culture and identity as they have been interpreted throughout this dissertation. This new rendering of the *MMDI* aligns with the analysis of data which suggest that students from Danville arrived in college very much identified in their histories. Certainly their *understanding* of themselves (or their selves) and their identities may have continued to evolve, but the selves of students from Danville seemed to arrive in college long in tact and rurality, as it was expressed through practices of identification with their rural culture, proved highly influential in the college-going behaviors and the patterns of postsecondary persistence of first-year college students from Danville.

Rurality: At Issue for Higher Education

The review of literature in Chapter 2 saw school location raised as a new dimension in educational opportunity, with rural students shown to be “consistently disadvantaged in postsecondary aspirations and enrollment” as compared to urban students (Hu, 2003, Abstract). The discussion of theoretical frameworks in Chapter 3 saw the myth of rural versus urban education shattered in Popkewitz' (1998) assertion

that they were one and the same in discourses of power which serve to normalize qualities of suburban education as the standard by which all others are measured. As both Chapters 2 and 3 revealed, rural students are not measuring up in college. Once they arrive in college, rural students are at high risk of academic failure or early withdrawal by virtue of their academic background, their prior academic performance, and/or the fact that theirs are not people with long or successful histories in higher education (Pizzolato, 2003, pp. 798-799).

In concluding this dissertation, I want to suggest that rural students like those from Danville are at high risk for early withdrawal from college, yet this risk may easily go unrecognized or unaddressed in higher education in light of the privileged racial identities they carry. This privileged social identity renders white rural students invisible in discussions of access and equity in higher education.

With his challenge to higher education research to take the self-reflexive turn, Tanaka (2002) discussed the “inadequacy of doing research from a one-culture view of history” and urged higher education research to locate “each student in his or her own time and history” (p. 269). He went on to say:

In education research, this would mean studying the historical context of power for the ethnic culture, gender, sexual orientation, and other social identifiers of each student. For example, too much information is lost in treating Asian Americans as a homogeneous, exoticized category. (Tanaka, 2002, p. 269)

I argue the same is true for white rural students. Too much information is lost when they are treated as an *idylized* category. When they are white, rural students are easily assumed to occupy the powerful social locations which are associated with white

racial identities in higher education. They are presupposed to arrive at higher education's door with cultural knowledges and supports that would contribute to their success as college students, particularly at predominantly white postsecondary institutions. This very logical supposition, however, ignores another important aspect of who these students are: namely, rural.

While Popkewitz (1998) troubled the myth of the urban/rural dichotomy, the concept of rurality as it has been elaborated in this study, confounds the binary of privilege that stereotypes white students. It denaturalizes Whiteness and refocuses the discussion on agency in access and persistence in higher education. Amid the hegemonic discourses of education as they were brought to light in Chapter 3, specifically those of globalization and suburban schooling, agency is a thing which rural students have very little of, regardless of their racial identities. As Beeson and Strange (2003) wrote, rural students, like so many of their urban counterparts, "are left behind from the start" (press release).

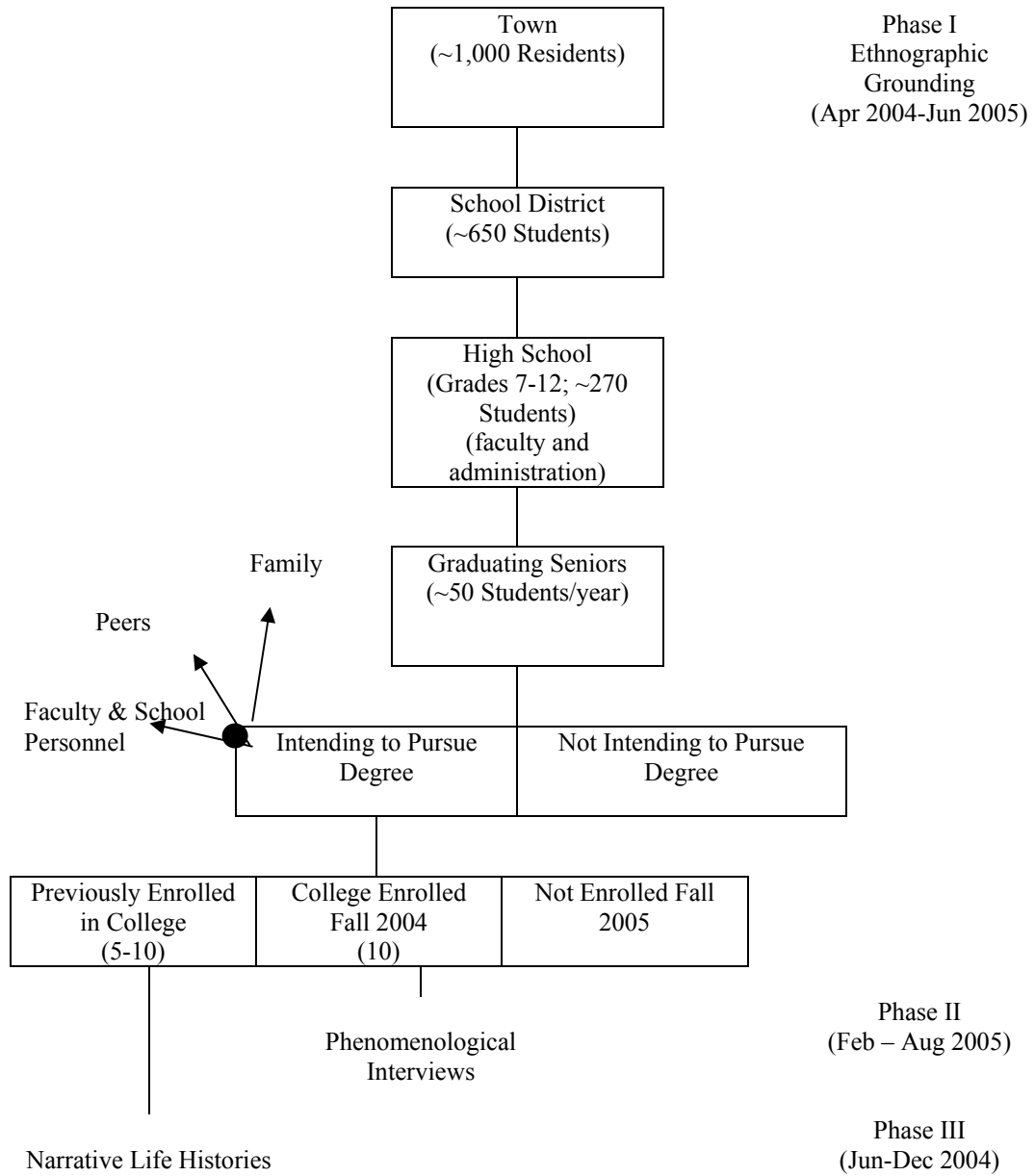
From an empiricist perspective, the rural landscape in Danville is white. From the perspectives of culture and identity, rurality becomes the landscape of the self. It is a personal identity constituted through cultural structures and practices of identification in communities whose existence is frequently questioned – if not completely overlooked – in the current rush of globalization and fast capital (see, for example, Brysk, 2003; Edmondson, 2003; Foucault, 1991a; Mitchell et al., 2004; Stromquist, 2002). The landscapes of rurality held profound implications for the patterns of postsecondary persistence and degree attainment in Danville, Ohio. As the analyses of data throughout this dissertation have shown, research participants were operating from a set of local

cultural logics that simply lose relevance in settings of higher education.

In its examination of identity as a relational process associated with a particular time and place, this dissertation provides new understanding of the college-going behaviors of students from Danville in that rurality – their culture and their identity – rendered the decision to return to Danville a rational response given the cultural logics that informed their college-going processes. By casting their patterns of postsecondary persistence in light of rurality, this research may hold implications for white students from other rural areas, as well, in its suggestion of this core identity as an often overlooked demographic by which students might be identified for purposes of access and persistence in higher education.

APPENDIX A

Sampling Plan



APPENDIX B

Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000

Data Set: Census 2000 Summary File

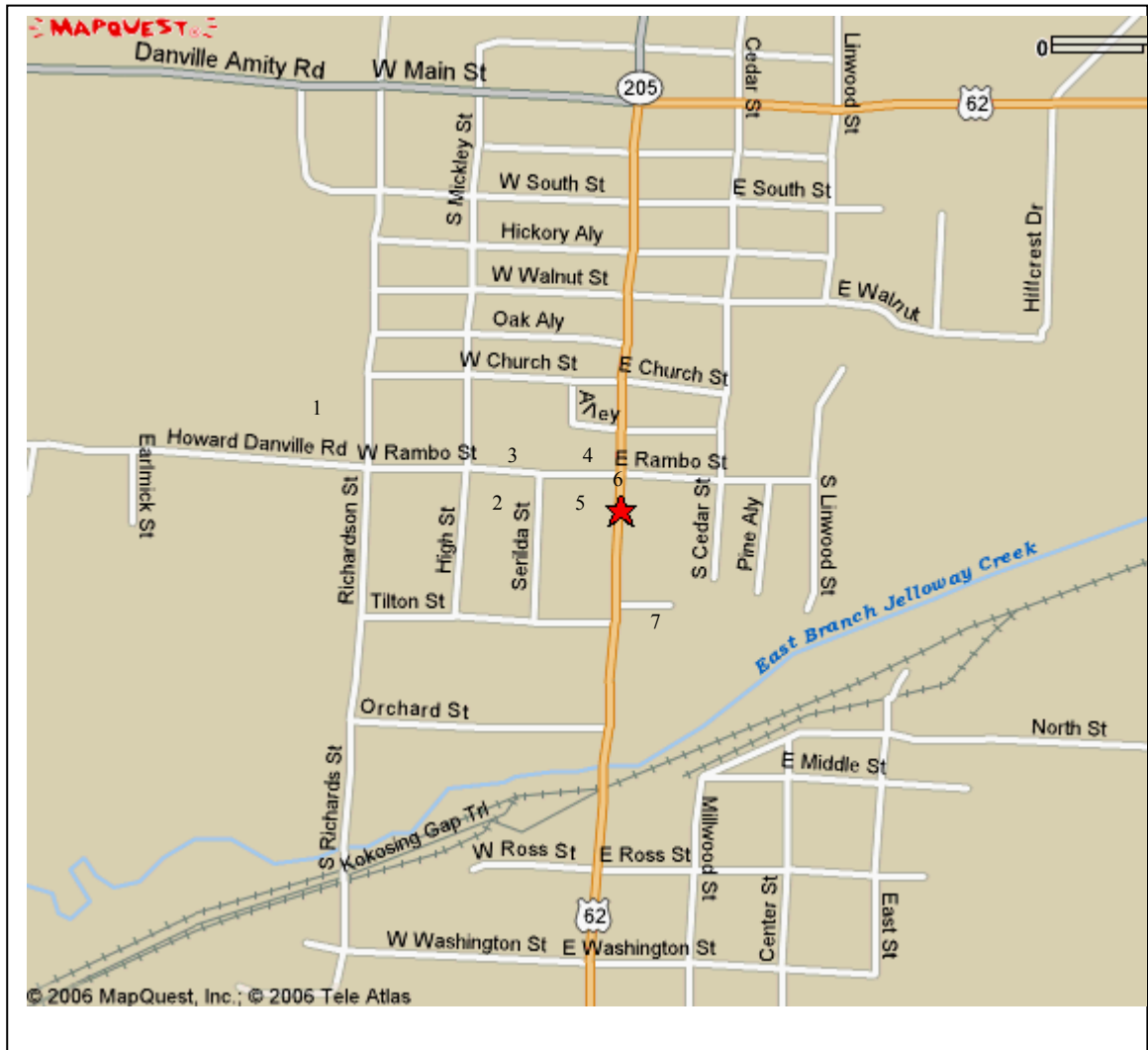
Geographic Area: **Danville village, Ohio**

COMMUTING TO WORK		
Workers 16 years and over	429	100.0
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	334	77.9
Car, truck, or van -- carpooled	52	12.1
Public transportation (including taxicab)	1	0.2
Walked	30	7.0
Other means	3	0.7
Worked at home	9	2.1
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	24.6	(X)
Employed civilian population 16 years and over	439	100.0
OCCUPATION		
Management, professional, and related occupations	89	20.3
Service occupations	67	15.3
Sales and office occupations	96	21.9
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	8	1.8
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	49	11.2
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	130	29.6
INDUSTRY		
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	17	3.9
Construction	27	6.2
Manufacturing	122	27.8
Wholesale trade	6	1.4
Retail trade	48	10.9
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	23	5.2
Information	4	0.9
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	23	5.2
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	10	2.3
Educational, health and social services	91	20.7
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	19	4.3
Other services (except public administration)	22	5.0
Public administration	27	6.2
CLASS OF WORKER		
Private wage and salary workers	330	75.2
Government workers	72	16.4
Self-employed workers in own not incorporated business	35	8.0
Unpaid family workers	2	0.5
POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 (below poverty level)		
Families	42	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	15.0
With related children under 18 years	31	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	20.7
With related children under 5 years	17	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	21.8
Families with female householder, no husband present	29	(X)

Percent below poverty level	(X)	53.7
With related children under 18 years	27	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	81.8
With related children under 5 years	15	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	100.0
Individuals	155	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	15.2
18 years and over	101	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	13.5
65 years and over	23	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	13.5
Related children under 18 years	48	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	18.1
Related children 5 to 17 years	27	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	16.7
Unrelated individuals 15 years and over	48	(X)
Percent below poverty level	(X)	28.2

APPENDIX C

The Streets of Danville



8

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 – Danville Elementary and Junior High School</p> <p>2 – Danville High School</p> <p>3 – St. Luke’s Community Center</p> <p>4 – St. Luke’s Church</p> | <p>5 – Danville Local Schools Administration Building</p> <p>6 – Danville Red Light ☺</p> <p>7 – Danville Methodist Church</p> <p>8 – Blue Devils Football Stadium</p> |
|---|--|
- (approximate locations)

APPENDIX D

The Darwin Fish Symbol



APPENDIX E

Graduation Survey: (Unformatted) Administered to graduating seniors at the end of the school year, 2005.

Please complete this survey by placing check marks next to the appropriate answers and providing short answers when necessary. Thank you.

High School

1. Will you be graduating this weekend? ___ yes!

___ no: If no, there is no need to continue with this survey. Please turn it back in to Tammy.

2. What is your grade point average? _____

3. What is your class rank? _____

4. College course work

completed during high school:

Course	Credits Earned	Location

5. What is your career choice / goal?

_____.

6. Do you have a computer at home? ___ yes: If yes, do you have internet access? ___
yes ___ no

___ no

7. Do you have a job for the summer? ___ yes: If yes, where? _____. Doing what? _____.

___ no: If no, what will you be doing this summer?

_____.

After Graduation

8. Who has been helpful to you in deciding what you would do after graduating? (Please check all that apply.)

___ Parents ___	___ Teacher(s) ___	___ Coach ___
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Brothers / Sisters _____	Mrs. Wilford _____	Clergy Member _____
Friends _____	Mr. Kotasek _____	
Others: Who? _____		

After you've checked off the people who have been helpful to you, please rank order (1, 2, 3, etc.) those you've checked off in terms of whose opinion and advice matters the most, with (1) being the one that matters most. [So, if you've checked off four options, you would rank just those four '1, 2, 3, 4'. If you checked off just two, then rank just those two '1, 2', and so on...]

9. If you intend to enroll in postsecondary education for the coming year, what degree will you pursue?

Technical Degree Associate's Bachelor's Certification: Type?

_____.

Other: Please explain _____.

9.1 What will be your major/area of study?

_____.

9.2 Do you plan to live on campus? yes

no: If no, will you:

look for off-campus college/university housing?

live with family away from home, near your college/university?

commute from home, here in the

Danville area?

other: please explain

_____.

9.3 Are you the first in your family to go to college? yes

no

9.4 Do you think you will return to live in the Danville area after college?

yes

no

10. If you do NOT intend to enroll in postsecondary education, what are your plans for the coming year? _____

_____.

10.1 Will you: ___ live with your parents/family?
 ___ move out on your own?
 ___ other: please explain

_____.

10.2 Do you plan to stay in the Danville area? ___ yes
 ___ no: If no, where will you ?

_____.

Demographic Information:

Have others in your family completed: (Please check all educational levels that apply in the first column and indicate which family member(s) completed that level in the corresponding space in the second column.)

Education Level	Which family member(s)?	
___ High school /GED?	1.	3.
	2.	4.
___ Some college coursework post high school?	1.	3.
	2.	4.
___ Technical degree?	1.	3.
	2.	4.
___ Associates (2-year) degree?	1.	3.
	2.	4.
___ Bachelor's (4-year) degree?	1.	3.
	2.	4.
___ Graduate degree?	1.	3.
	2.	4.
other: please explain	1.	3.

	2.	4.

What is your current marital / partnered status?	
What is your race / ethnicity?	
What is your religious affiliation?	
How old are you?	
What is your sex / gender?	

Please use the space below to clarify any of your answers or provide information you feel important to the purposes of this survey.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME and CONGRATULATIONS!
(Stay safe this weekend!)

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