GOOD KIDS, BAD KIDS: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REPUTATIONS FOR

YOUTH GROWING UP RURAL

by

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Good Kids, Bad Kids: The Social Construction of Reputations for Youth Growing Up Rural

Dissertation directed by Assistant Professor Dr. Ben Kirshner

ABSTRACT

"Idle" is a label applied by policymakers to young people (ages 16-24) who are not employed, attending school, or registered with the military. Youth who are disconnected from education or employment for more than two years are likely to experience a lifetime of social and economic hardships. Although researchers understand the demographic characteristics of this population, few empirical studies examine the contextual factors that contribute to idleness and disconnection. In this dissertation, I used youth participatory action research and ethnographic methods to examine how identities were socially constructed in a rural community located in the western United States. I explore the implications of these identities on youths' trajectories of participation in academic and community life.

I found there were two dominant models of identity available to young people: "good kids" and "bad kids." Participants referred to these identities as reputations. Reputations were a powerful force in the lives of youth growing up rural. Reputations shaped social interactions, influenced access to education and employment opportunities, and affected engagement with institutions and programs designed for youth. Young people who were viewed as having a "bad" reputation experienced negative consequences including limited access to learning environments that would help them navigate a route to productive adulthood. In addition, my analysis revealed that youth were not solely responsible for the development of a reputation. Reputations were, instead, created through individual and social processes that were informed by specific

characteristics of place and shaped by the social and organizational practices of adults. Programs or interventions aimed at helping youth ultimately reinforced the target population's reputation as "bad kids." Based on the findings of this study, I advocate for researchers, educators, and prevention professionals to expand our understanding about the factors that contribute to idleness and consider new ways to connect youth.

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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

There are approximately 38 million people, ages 16 to 24, in the United States. While

most are engaged in educational or work experiences that will prepare them to lead autonomous

adult lives, about 15% are not. Policymakers have labeled young people who are not employed,

attending school, or registered with the military as "idle" (KidsCount, 2004; Montalvo &

O'Hara, 2008; Sum, Mangum, & Taggart, 2002). Instead of engaging with the institutions,

supports and opportunities designed to support their transition from adolescence to adulthood,

idle youth follow a different path.

More than one third of all youth experience a short-term period of idleness (Besharov &

Gardiner, 1998). And research indicates that by age 25 most idle youth do eventually connect to

social supports and/or the labor force. There are, however, approximately three million young

people whose idleness becomes a more permanent condition. These youth remain disconnected

from institutions, legal work, and formal education making them vulnerable to a lifetime of

instability and profound hardship (Wald & Martinez, 2003). Youth who are disconnected for

more than two years are more likely than their "connected" peers to remain unemployed, become

incarcerated, rely on public assistance, raise children in poverty, become homeless, and suffer

the effects of violence and substance abuse (Besharov & Gardiner, 1998).

A 2008 keyword search in the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), using

the terms "disconnected youth" or "idle youth" identified a total of only fifteen publications

(three of which appeared in peer reviewed journals). In most of the literature reviewed for this

project the terms idle and disconnected are used interchangeably with an emphasis upon the

difference between short-term and long-term detachment from society. According to Besharov &

Gardiner (1998), short-term idleness (or disconnection) refers to being detached from school or employment for 26 or more weeks in one or two calendar years, whereas long-term is defined by being detached for more than two years. This distinction is important because short-term idle youth are not as likely to suffer the serious social and economic hardships experienced by long-term idle youth.

America's idle youth are a large and diverse group and there is no comprehensive assessment of the entire population. Instead, many experts divide the population into two groups: youth 14 to17 and young adults 18 to 25. This makes sense because policies, societal expectations, protections, and services available to young people are usually dependent upon whether an individual is under or above age 18. Furthermore, this division highlights a need for early prevention for youth as well as the importance of continued services and support for young adults (Wald & Martinez, 2003).

Youth ages 14 to17 are especially at risk for long-term disconnection if they fall into one or more of the following four categories: did not complete high school, immersed in the juvenile justice system, involved with foster care, and single mothers (KidsCount, 2004). Youth who do not complete high school are three times more likely that those who graduate to experience long term disconnection, including those who eventually obtain their GED (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2008; KidsCount, 2004). Furthermore, most youth who experience long-term disconnection come from low-income households, are likely to suffer from untreated mental illness, substance abuse and disabilities, have experienced child abuse or neglect; and have a history of behavioral problems resulting in expulsion from school. For these youth, disconnection from schools and employment restricts access to services and programs designed to support their needs. An interruption of services can lead to initial periods of idleness as well as contribute to long-term disconnection (KidsCount, 2004; Zweig, 2003). While the majority of youth designated idle are

non-Hispanic white youth, African American and Hispanic youth are disproportionately represented. There are equal numbers of males and females across the four high-risk categories (Wald & Martinez, 2003; KidsCount, 2004).

One of the most striking facts about idle youth in the United States is their geographic distribution. Numerically speaking most live in urban areas. But a recent study found rural young adults (ages 18 to 24) more likely to be idle than their urban counterparts throughout the country (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2008). In each region the percentage of idleness was highest in rural areas; the largest discrepancy was found in the west. Table 1 displays the percentage of idle young people in rural and urban areas across regions.

Table 1

Percentage of idle youth in each region of the United States.

Region	Urban	Rural
Northeast	8.8	9.2
Midwest	8.5	8.9
South	10.9	14.2
West	10.1	18.4

Adopted from Snyder & McLaughlin, 2008

Identifying demographic and behavioral factors is an important first step towards understanding the phenomenon of idle youth and the factors that lead to long-term disconnection, but it only tells part of the story. What is missing is an understanding of how youth navigate the route from short-term idleness to long-term disconnection. The literature suggests that we still need to understand the challenges that lead to initial idleness, obstacles to reengagement after a brief spell of idleness, and why youth remain engaged with systems and services designed to support their needs. Finally, experts agree that we need to develop a deep understanding about

the role context plays in the process of youth becoming disconnected (KidsCount, 2004; Snyder & McLaughlin, 2008; Wald & Martinez, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to better understand the lives and experiences of youth, ages 14 to 18, most "at risk" of becoming disconnected in a rural place. I set out to learn how youths' experiences within school and community promoted engagement or encouraged withdrawal and influenced developmental pathways. By examining youth participation and interactions with adults in a variety of community and youth specific locales, I explored how social and physical aspects of the environment shaped the trajectories of youth who had experienced or were currently experiencing idleness. Consistent with Panelli's (2002) suggested framework for conducting research about rural youth, I engaged youth as active participants and privileged youth perspectives. Two research questions, which were designed in collaboration with my community partner, guided this dissertation: How were idle identities constructed in a rural community? What can rural communities do to prevent idleness?

A Note About Terms: Idle and Disconnected

According to Vadeboncouer (2005), "one of the quintessential markers of the social construction of adolescents is the language that is used to objectify, refer to, and categorize young people" (p. 5). I agree, whether this language is present in everyday talk or social science discourse. This created an intractable dilemma for me during this dissertation: How do I talk and write about youth labeled as idle or disconnected (or any of the labels present in this document) without reifying these categories as possible social identities for youth?

The approach I take to this problem is to use these terms – because they help situate my study in a broader set of research and policy concerns – while at the same time deconstructing them through my analysis. Terms such as idle and disconnected are not meant to represent

characteristics or attributes attached to individual youth, but instead represent socially

constructed conditions. In this dissertation (and in subsequent articles) I strive to frame my

analysis in a manner that will result in researchers, practitioners, and youth themselves to rethink

the meaning and consequences of this language in a variety of discourses.

Arrangement of the Dissertation

The chapters that follow highlight the experiences of a cross section of youth growing up

in a rural and geographically isolated community of the Rocky Mountain west. I focus on how

community members draw on available resources to construct social identities for youth and how

adults utilized these identities to grant or deny youth access to available programs and

opportunities. In Chapter Two, I review literature that documents changes occurring in rural

areas across the nation and describe challenges facing researchers who wish to capture the

nuances and variation among rural youth's lives. I also present what is empirically known about

how rural contexts matter for youth development. Chapter Three describes the theoretical lenses

I combined to make sense of youth experiences and to understand how youth interactions with

social and physical aspects of place influenced identity formation. In Chapter Four, I detail my

research design. I include an overview of the research context, a discussion of my strategies of

inquiry, and a description of the techniques used to analyze data. Chapters Five through Seven

report key findings. First, I present what I learned about how place mattered in the construction

of youth identity. I discuss how changes to the identity of this place and local economic

conditions created tensions, which informed the kinds of social identities that were available to

youth in this community. Next, I describe the categories of identity available to youth, the

importance of youth reputations in a small town, and the impact having a "bad" reputation had

on youth. Specifically, I show how reputations determined access to programs and opportunities

critical to the transition to adulthood, which influenced youth's abilities to imagine and seek

productive futures. The last findings chapter illustrates how processes of positioning, thickening, and authoring contributed to the social construction of idle identities. In my conclusion, Chapter Eight, I discuss the significance of these findings for understanding the experiences of youth growing up rural and idle or disconnected youth. I include implications for scholars, outline practical implications for educators and social service providers in rural communities, and offer suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Research about young rural lives in the U.S. is scarce (Khattri, et al., 1997; Perkins, 2002). Because rural environments are quite diverse and changing rapidly, disagreements exist about how rural is defined and how rural environments influence youth development. I divided this review into two sections. The first section describes steps in my search for literature and relevant information about the quality and quantity of studies available about rural youth. The second section details empirical studies that explore how multiple contexts influence rural youth identity formation and developmental pathways.

Initial Search

Disconnected and Idle Youth

The results of the Snyder and McLaughlin (2008) report documenting relatively greater percentages of idle youth in rural areas made me curious: what is it about living in a rural place that contributes to youth becoming idle? To begin to answer this question I conducted an ERIC keyword search using "disconnected" or "idle" youth. These articles helped me to define the problem and revealed important demographic profiles about the population, which I discussed in the introduction. But I was unable to locate studies or reports that concentrated on idle youth residing in rural areas. Most, instead, focused on understanding the plight of urban youth and the impact this population has on the workforce and economy of large cities. For example, one report described the population of disconnected youth in New York City, including the historical response to the problem as well as future opportunities and possible options for supporting disconnected youth in the city. It also included an analysis of seven industries likely to provide work opportunities for this population of young people (Fischer, 2006).

Urban vs. Rural

In my initial searches I was struck by the difference between the amounts of research conducted with rural youth as compared to urban youth. When I searched keyword terms urban and youth or adolescent between 1998 and present, without restricting to peer-reviewed articles, the search yielded a total of 1947 published items, yet a similar search for rural and youth or adolescent yielded only 757 items. I also noticed a discrepancy in the types of journals that contained articles about rural youth. Scholarly articles about rural adolescents were often published in specialized journals such as *The Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *The Journal of Rural Community Psychology* and *The Journal of Rural Studies*. While I appreciate the importance of journals focused on specific populations, exclusive publication in specialized journals is problematic if it leaves out rural youth from broader academic discourse about youth development.

This disparity reflects the tenor of current educational policy debates about school reform, school funding, English language learners, academic achievement, teacher recruitment, and challenges faced by low income and/or minority students, which rarely mention rural communities and schools. Some scholars who study rural areas assert that the void is not a matter of misunderstanding or indifference to the lives of rural populations but instead is due to an issue of constituency. Rural people are widely dispersed in areas that hold little political or economic power making them virtually invisible to mainstream scholars and policymakers. Even in states where the rural population is sizeable, such as California with over 2.5 million rural people, rural people are in the minority (Beeson & Strange, 2000). Another problem is the lack of agreement about what it means to be rural.

What is Rural?

Rural is defined in a variety of ways depending on who is doing the defining and for what purpose. Khattri, et al. (1997), in their review of research on students in rural areas, summarized three of the most frequently utilized definitions of geographic location. These definitions are created by: the U.S. Bureau of the Census (BC), the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and each vary considerably according to size, distribution and characteristics of rural places.

The BC definition is based upon size and density of population in a geographical location. For example, if an area has less than 2500 people or an overall density of less than 500 persons per square-mile it is considered rural. The definition from the OMB, on the other hand, designates entire counties as either metro or non-metro; if a county does not have a city with more that 50,000 inhabitants or an urbanized area with at least 100,000 people it is deemed non-metro. NCES uses a system to classify schools. Recently revised in 2006, this classification has four major locales: city, urban, town, and rural, with each sub divided into subcategories. This system differentiates towns and rural areas on the basis of their proximity to larger "urban areas" or "urban clusters", which are densely settled areas with populations of 50,000-250,000 or 25,000-50,000 respectively. This system allows NCES to distinguish rural schools and districts in remote areas from those that may be located just outside an urban center (NCES, 2009). This classification system captures important information not only about the location but also about the types of services such as health care and transportation available in an area.

In addition to these definitions at the federal level, there are a variety of other definitions applied by researchers. For example, Lippman et al. (1996) classified rural as a farming community or small town with less than 50,000 and not a suburb or on an Indian reservation; and the Frontier Education Center used the BC system with an additional matrix in place created in

consultation with each state, creating more of a place-based, less universal, definition. Additionally, some studies have a default definition and simply define rural by what it is not—an area that is not urban. Multiple definitions makes thinking and talking seriously about the issues facing the lives of rural youth challenging for researchers, policymakers, and educators (Beeson & Strange, 2000).

A New Image for Rural America

The gap in scholarship about rural youth is unfortunate given the demographic shifts currently taking place in the United States. Traditionally rural areas have experienced slow population growth, or decline, and have been perceived of as overwhelmingly non-Hispanic white. Currently, however, many rural populations are growing quickly and racial and ethnic diversity in rural areas is increasing (Johnson, 2006).

During much of the 20th century most rural communities experienced a population loss. People hoping to take advantage of the opportunities located in urban areas migrated from rural areas to cities. Now, however, many rural areas are experiencing an in-migration. Figure 1 shows net in-migration to nonmetro counties between 2005 and 2009. People are leaving urban and suburban areas in search of more affordable housing, a "better" quality of life, or a place to spend their retirement. Plus there has been an increase in immigrant populations moving to rural areas. Between 2002-2005 enrollment in rural schools grew by 15% while non-rural enrollment declined. And in 2006 nearly 30% of all public school students were enrolled in rural schools. Additionally, in 2007 rural schools reported a 55% increase in minority students and schools in some states experienced a 100% increase (Johnson & Strange, 2007).

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service analysis of data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
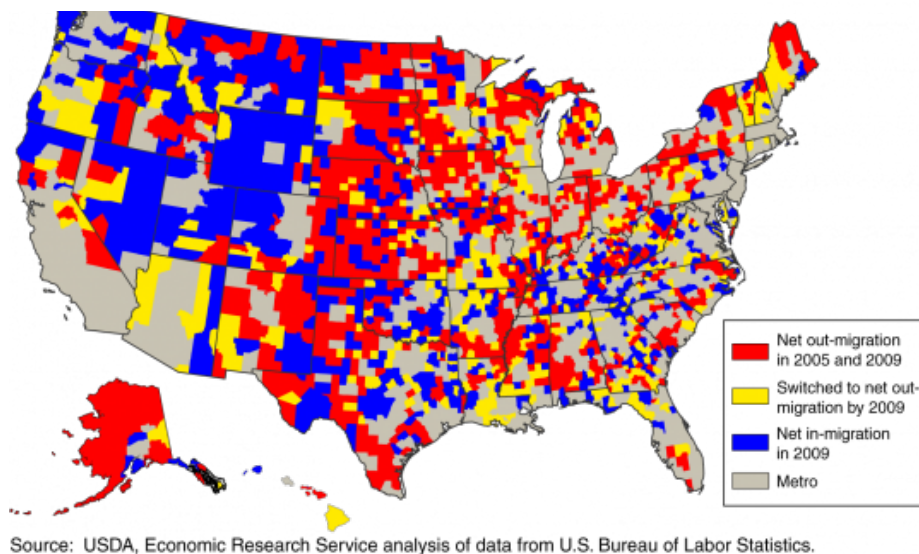
Figure 1. Nonmetro counties migration between 2005-06 and 2008-09

Rural economies are also changing. Originally farming and mining dominated the employment and economic structure of rural areas. While farming remains important in many rural communities, only six and a half percent of the American labor force is engaged with farming, and overall economic dependence on agriculture has decreased. Currently retail, services, and manufacturing dominate rural economies (Johnson, 2006).

Rural Youth

In the next steps of my initial search, instead of looking for articles about idle rural youth, I expanded my search and cast a much larger net hoping to capture any article that might help me better understand the challenges and prospects for youth living in rural areas. A separate ERIC search, this time for peer-reviewed articles about rural youth, identified 122 published in the last decade. Thirty-four of these focused on youth outside the United States.

I reviewed these abstracts and grouped all but seven into four categories: individual youth behaviors, risk factors, interventions, and context characteristics. This process introduced me to a broad spectrum of empirical work conducted in rural areas and provided me with a general

understanding of what is known, scientifically, about young people growing up in rural environments. Findings from this body of literature reported on individual behaviors attached to youth such as "deviant" acts (Beymer & Hutchinson, 2002), running away from home (Thrane, et al., 2006), or alcohol and methamphetamine use (Lambert et al., 2008; Stein & Hussong, 2007); and defined risk factors such as mental health issues (Robbins, et al., 2008), injury rates associated with all terrain vehicles (Jones & Bleeker, 2005), or the dramatic increase in childhood obesity (Paxton, et al., 2004). Studies about interventions detailed or evaluated specific initiatives implemented in rural schools such as the implementation of science education curricula (Shepardson, et al., 2007) or the benefits of using technology with gifted rural students (Belcastro, 2002). The last category explored some of the unique characteristics of rural contexts (e.g. geographic location, community or schools) and the influence of contexts on youth development. Some studies highlighted how rural contexts can have a positive influence on youth development due to local cultural practices such as participating in faith based activities (Hodge et al., 2001; Larson & Dearmont, 2002), or parenting styles (Chan & Elder, 2001), while others demonstrated the negative affects of growing up rural due to limited resources and poor economic conditions (McGrath, 2001).

Over half of the studies I surveyed in this review of abstracts focused on individual youth behaviors and risk factors that affect the development and life outcomes for rural youth. Studies provided ample evidence that rural youth are not sheltered from many of the same behaviors, struggles, and challenges experienced by urban and suburban youth; and suggest, in some cases, being rural may exacerbate these conditions.

Knowledge about individual youth behaviors and characteristics without a deep understanding of the contexts in which they live can lead to a one-dimensional approach to support youth development. This is most evident in programs that work to change individual

youth without attempts to alter their environment. Experts in the field of youth development argue that this type of program has limited, short-term success but does not support long-term, positive development for youth (Benson, et al., 2006). Some scholars argue that it is context itself that creates problems for youth. For example in her investigation of high school "drop outs" in an urban school district, Fine (1991) gave a compelling account of how structures, policies, and practices within schools influenced negative student outcomes but the leadership in the district located the failure to graduate with the students.

A more effective approach to understand and support healthy development of rural youth is to acknowledge that development occurs within multiple contexts and strive to understand the "developing person, the contexts in which the person is embedded and the dynamic interaction between the two" (Benson, et al., 2006, p. 903). This approach shifts the unit of analysis from the individual to the contexts in which rural youth go about their lives and addresses how ecological factors affect youth. It de-emphasizes what goes wrong and strives to highlight how developmentally rich contexts can nurture positive development, which contributes to the creation of spaces in which youth thrive and become engaged in their worlds (Irby, et. al., 2003). Consistent with this approach to youth development, I focused my next search on empirical studies that explored the role of context in the lives of rural youth.

Focused Search

Features of Rural Environments that Contribute to Idleness and Disconnection

Demographic shifts and the variation in idleness across rural and urban areas in the United States indicate a growing need to understand the contexts of young rural lives (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2006; Wald & Martinez, 2003). My goal in this section is to bring together a body of literature published in the last decade that conveys what is understood about rural contexts as well as the relationship between rurality and developmental trajectories. I focused only on

studies about youth who live in countries with per capita incomes of more than $10,000, and excluded research about youth who grow up in countries with per capita incomes of less that $1,000, because life conditions (e.g. politics, lifestyles and poverty) are too disparate for comparison (International Labor Organization, 2006).

I divided my synthesis into two sections. The first section reviews studies that examine how multiple contexts in rural areas influence youth development. The second section reviews studies of how rural youth envision and plan for their futures. For each study, I provide a synopsis, relevant findings, and include a brief discussion about the implications these findings have for understanding rural youth transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Studies I reviewed in my focused search are summarized in Table 2.

Rural context matters. The studies in this section explore the relationship between local domains, in which youth live their lives such as family, school, and community; and the broader contexts in which these are embedded, for example cultural, social, economic, and political. Specifically this research demonstrates how contexts matter for youth as they negotiate social relations and navigate their way from adolescence to adulthood.

In a longitudinal study that followed 451 Midwestern youth and their families from seventh grade through graduation from high school, Elder and Conger (2000) investigated how multiple contexts including family, school, church, and community life shaped both adolescent aspirations and identity. Data for this seven-year project were collected through interviews, observations, and surveys. Findings from this widely cited work suggested that attachment to place and rural values contributed to healthy and positive youth development by providing a strong sense of identity, social connection, and commitment to place. Specifically this study found youth from farming families with "ties to the land" to be more successful across all domains than other youth.

Table 2

Focused literature review: Features of rural contexts that affect youth development.

Author & Date	Setting, Participants & Data Collected	Relevant Findings
Elder & Conger, 2000.	USA. Midwestern region of the country. Eight different rural counties. Followed 451 youth and families from 7th grade thru high school graduation. Interviews, observations & surveys.	Longitudinal study examined multiple domains in rural environment: family, school, & community. Success for rural youth was linked to families with a farming background. Emphasized the importance of intergenerational ties to the land for positive youth development.
Matthews, et al., 2000	England: 12 rural villages located in remote northern section of the country. 372 youth ages 9-16. Surveys and interviews.	Documented youth perspectives about growing up rural. Findings challenge misconceptions of rural places being ideal places to raise children.
MacTavish & Salamon, 2006	USA. Midwest. Small town population <5000. Ten youth ages 15-17. Interviews with youth and families, observations, & data from school- grades, etc. Photo documentation by youth.	Examined multiple domains in rural environment. Identified three profiles of developmental pathways for rural youth: flourishing, static and foundering. Documented how community and academic life contributed to each path. Found that rurality did not affect all youth equally or positively.
Jones, 2002	Wales: Rural area-population <3200. Interviews with 41 youth ages 11-18. Observations of youth club where youth gathered.	Documented how practices in schools and after-school activities impacts construction of adolescent identities. Illustrates how broader political and economic contexts affect youth development.
Kraack & Kenway, 2002	Australia: Rural coastal town with a population~5000. 36 youth ages 13-16 participated in interviews; researcher observations of public spaces.	Examined social interactions between youth and adults. Explored the relationship between broader social contexts (the shifting of the national economy) and adult perceptions of youth behavior in public spaces.
Hektner, 1998	USA. Twelve rural areas across the country. Survey data from 918 students. In 8th, 10th & 12th grades.	Compared data collected from youth in rural and non-rural areas. Rural youth experience more conflicts when making decisions about their futures than youth in more populated areas.
Howley, 2006	USA. Rural areas across the country. Survey data collected from ~ 3000 youth ages ten and up.	Compared data collected from youth in rural and non-rural areas. Due to attachment to place rural youth expected they would complete less education than did non-rural counterparts.
Burnell, 2003	USA: Northeast region of the country. Eleven rural counties in NY. Interviews with 26 youth in 12th grade.	Documented why academically able youth from rural areas chose not to attend college. Findings revealed students did not perceive continued education to benefit their futures and believed college would only "delay" adulthood.
Corbett, 2007	Canada: Rural coastal community. Two interviews with 20 youth ages 13-16; one at the beginning of school year and one at the end of the year.	Identified tensions experienced by rural youth when imagining their futures. Revealed that tensions led to three potential paths when making transition from adolescence to adulthood.

For example, farm youth achieved more academically and socially, possessed more self-confidence, and avoided problem behaviors (e.g. drug/alcohol use, sexual promiscuity and delinquent acts) than youth whose families were not connected to farming.

In this study the authors found farm youths' successes were linked to the social resources of their farming families and parenting conducted outside of the home. For example, farm parents increased the influence they had in the lives of their children by working collaboratively with their children on the farm. Youth were then more likely to engage in community, school and civic institutions because their parents had a high level of civic participation. Working on the farm also increased youth feelings of mastery and competence which led to youth becoming more involved than other youth with productive labor (paid and unpaid) throughout high school. The work of Elder and Conger highlights the importance of intergenerational ties for developing adolescents and provides evidence that a rural existence can benefit youth development in meaningful ways.

Matthews, et al. (2000) conducted a study in a remote area of northern England designed to examine rurality from a youth perspective. Participants included 372 youth, ages 9 to 16, from 12 rural villages. Researchers recruited local outreach workers to administer door-to-door surveys and to conduct semi-structured interviews with youth in public places.

Results showed that youth, especially the least affluent, felt dislocated and detached from community life. Participants reported that their needs and aspirations were not being met due to a lack of opportunities and services such as few places to get together with other young people and limited transportation; and described feelings of boredom and isolation. These findings challenge popular discourses about rural areas being places where "happy, healthy lifestyles are lived and where (young) people can enjoy the benefits of trouble free environments, away from the

stresses and uncertainties of the urban mayhem" (p.141). The authors highlight how the "rural idyll" was not a perspective shared by youth.

MacTavish and Salamon (2006) designed an ethnographic study to examine the developmental pathways available to rural youth in rural trailer park, on the outskirts of a small town, with a population of approximately 5000, in central Illinois. Participants included ten youth, ages 15 to 17. In this study researchers investigate how contexts most central to youth development contribute to individual trajectories. In contrast to Elder and Conger (2000), this study illustrates how small town life in a rural area functions to support the development of some youth and not others.

Data collection took place over 12 months and included family interviews to obtain family histories, observations of the participants daily lives across multiple contexts, interviews with youth and school records establishing grades, attendance, and standardized test scores. A camera activity and a youth-led neighborhood tour created opportunities for youth to participate in the documentation of their own lives. These data were then used to construct a developmental profile for each participant. Through this process, MacTavish and Salamon identified three distinct pathways for youth: flourishing, static, and floundering. The flourishing path led youth toward social mobility. The static path was equated with social reproduction and the floundering path led to narrowed life choices. Once developmental pathways were established for each participant the researchers set out to map the resources, risks, and opportunities youth might encounter on each route. The researchers looked closely at interactions, participation, and patterns of engagement in three social contexts: a trailer park neighborhood where all the participants lived, the school, and the small town in which both were situated.

Findings from this study suggest that youth on different paths experienced the local settings in remarkably different ways. For example, youth on the flourishing path felt welcome

and connected to the small town and, as a result, engaged in many of the activities offered at school and in the community (e.g. cheerleading, church activities, and summer employment). Floundering youth, on the other hand, spoke negatively of the school and community. They described feeling stigmatized for living in the trailer park and often said they were bored. The authors highlight how school practices and community processes worked to include or exclude youth from a trailer park neighborhood. In order to change one's status from floundering to flourishing youth felt pressure to cut off all social interactions with people from within the trailer park and concentrate solely on forging relationships to "in-town" peers and adults, especially those from the middle-class.

Jones (2002) conducted her study in a rural area of Wales with a population of approximately 3200. Data were collected via interviews with 41 youth ages 11 to 18 and through observation at a local youth club where youth convened. In this study, the researcher examined social practices and participant structures in a rural Welsh community that was currently experiencing an in-migration of people from England. The purpose was to understand how schools and after-school activities contributed to the construction of cultural boundaries within the community.

Findings demonstrate that a school practice of separating youth into three categories dependent upon linguistic abilities (Welsh, English, and bilingual) reinforced socially constructed cultural boundaries, which then spilled over into after school activities and influenced youth behavior. For example, youth who displayed, "disorderly" and "unhealthy" behaviors (e.g., smoking and drinking) were characterized as "acting English," whereas behaviors that were considered "respectful," "traditional" or "patriotic" were associated with the Welsh youth. Based upon behavior, the youth were positioned by adults and by other youth as either insiders or outsiders to the community, which affected membership into clubs and

activities outside of school. This created a situation in which only certain activities were available to particular groups based on a socially constructed idea of what it meant to be English or Welsh.

This study illustrates a case in which institutional practices constructed "metaphorical markers" of identity (behaviors) and signified cultural affiliation with either a Welsh or English heritage. It highlights how broader social conditions (e.g. nationalities, and politically constructed boundaries) affected local contexts and the lives of youth.

Kraack and Kenway (2002) conducted their research in a rural coastal area of Australia, in a town called Paradise, with a population of 5000. Researchers collected data over the course of three months in the year 2000 using semi-structured interviews with 36 youth, ages 13 to 16, and participant observations at a variety of community locations where youth were known to hang out (e.g. the beach, main street, and local events such as carnivals and sporting matches). The purpose of this study was to explore how changes to the local economy and the commodification of the rural lifestyle shaped youth identities. Specifically, the authors examined how youth used public space to construct their identities.

Findings illustrate how youth interactions with adults were influenced by changes in social and economic conditions. This study tells the story of how local perceptions of youth conduct change when the town's local economy shifts dramatically from timber and fishing industries to being dependent primarily on tourism. The authors state, "[the town] becomes a contested rural landscape where young people from the working class community collide with in-coming adults seeking an idyllic lifestyle"(p.151); and what was once seen as acceptable youth behavior starts to be seen as problematic because local adults are concerned that it will deter tourism. This highlights the important role regional conditions, embedded in national and global contexts, play in the process of youth development.

Effect of rurality on imagined futures. In this section, I present research that demonstrates a disparity between rural and non-rural youths' aspirations and shows how youth aspirations affect educational attainment and future employment options. These studies describe how growing up rural creates a unique series of obstacles for youth who aspire to post secondary education and career goals. At the same time, they challenge the assumption that "healthy" youth development is synonymous with youth leaving their home community in pursuit of education and economic opportunity.

Aspirations can be defined as a collection of dreams, hopes, and desires for one's future and "reflect individuals' ideas of their 'possible selves,' what they would like to become, what they might become, and what they do not wish to become" (Burnell, 2003, p.104). Aspirations are often seen as predictors of educational attainment and life outcomes (Howley, 2006) and evidence suggests that they are important first steps for youth as they prepare to transition from adolescence to adulthood. Scholars agree that although aspirations are individually constructed they are significantly influenced by external factors.

Hektner (1998) designed a study to investigate how rurality influences youths' aspirations of future education and career options. Participants for this study were selected from a separate longitudinal study of adolescent social development across twelve sites in the United States. Hektner chose a subgroup of 918 students in 8th, 10th and 12th grades equally representing a rural, urban, and suburban area of Illinois; and administered three questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed to test five hypotheses: 1) rural youth are more likely than non-rural to have conflicting aspirations about where they will live as adults; 2) youth with conflicting aspirations are more hesitant to make educational plans; 3) rural youth are more likely than non rural youth to experience uncertainty when making educational plans; 4) youth

with conflicting aspirations will experience high levels of anxiety; and 5) rural youth experience more anxiety than their non-rural counterparts.

The study found rural youth more likely than their non-rural counterparts to experience conflicts when deciding where to live after high school. For example, although most rural youth in this study expressed a desire to go to college in order to fulfill career aspirations they knew doing so meant having to permanently leave people and places to which they felt a strong connection. This conflict led to feelings of uncertainty and, for many, caused a delay in creating plans for the future. Rural youth who experienced this conflict also expressed feeling empty and angry about their futures; some indicated they would forfeit their education and career goals in favor of remaining in their home community.

Howley (2006) also set out to understand the influence of rural life on youth educational aspirations. In this study the author analyzed survey data collected in 2002 from approximately three thousand children, ages 10 and above, as part of the Child Development Supplement (CDS) to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). The CDS-PSID was a longitudinal investigation of economic and social behaviors of families throughout the United States administered by the University of Michigan. In her analyses, the author concentrated on two measures from the survey: the level of education children aspired to attain and the level of education children expected to attain. Using rescaled weighting methods she calculated descriptive statistics and logistic regression to explore youth aspirations and attachment to place and compared responses from non-rural and rural youth.

Findings from Howley's analyses indicate that rural youth were just as likely as non-rural to aspire to high school and undergraduate education but had significantly lower aspirations for graduate education. Additionally, rural youth were more likely to expect less education for themselves than non-rural youth. In order to explain these findings, Howley explored the

relationships among aspirations, expectations and attachment to place. She provides evidence that family attachment to place (as measured by caregiver refusal of jobs outside the community and future plans to relocate for economic, social and familial reasons) has implications for rural youth attachment to place and is associated with the decreased level of aspirations and expectations rural youth hold for themselves. For example, rural parents were more likely to turn down a job opportunity if it meant having to move away from their community even if it meant more income. Howley's research corroborates studies that have found rural families value place, their communities, and the lifestyle it affords; and challenges assumptions that lowered aspirations of rural youth are due to deficient rural schools. It suggests that instead of privileging education above all else, rural youth have a "dual commitment" both to their education and to local places. Howley concluded her article by advocating for ethnographic studies to help the field understand the meaning youth ascribe to rural life and to better understand how schools might support youth in this dual commitment.

Burnell (2003) focused her study on learning about the factors that influenced rural youth aspirations pertaining to post-secondary education and employment. She set out to understand why rural youth chose not to attend college. In this project the author interviewed 26 non-Hispanic, white, working-class, high school seniors from eleven rural counties located in New York State. She targeted students who were "academically able" to attend college but had chosen not to attend after graduation. Twenty-three of the 26 chose to enter the workforce immediately after high school.

A significant finding was that all of the youth interviewed described a stark contrast between college and what they identified as "the real world." They described continuation in school, by entering college, as a way to delay entry into the real world. According to these youth, staying in school would only serve to postpone the freedom and autonomy they associated with

adulthood and thus impede their ability to design their own life. It was not that they spoke

negatively about school or learning they just did not see how they could benefit from a college

experience. After all, the futures they projected for themselves did not require a high income or

elevated social status. Instead they described their future lifestyles as "average," "comfortable"

or "basic."

In this final study that examined rural youth aspirations, Corbett (2007) explored the

relationships among youth attachment to place, adolescent aspirations, and identity development.

Over three-years, the author interviewed (twice) 20 youth ages 13 to 16, from a rural, coastal

community in Canada. Interviews took place once in the beginning of the school year and again

at the end of the school year. Using an ethnographic interview framework, he identified three

themes that created tension in the lives of the youth participants. First, youth described feeling

safe and secure in their community. Second, youth believed that the community was unable to

sustain most adults throughout their working life due to a lack of resources and opportunities.

And third, youth acknowledged that although they saw education as important for life outside the

community, they did not see the value for those who remained local. Participants expressed

varied levels of attachment to place and community, yet all youth discussed how these three

ideas played out in their lives.

Findings from this study show that for rural youth the link between post-secondary

education and career success can be tenuous unless they develop what he calls "mobility

capital." Mobility capital refers to possessing a sense that one will, at some point, leave one's

home community in order to pursue academic and career goals. Youth acquire mobility capital

by exploring life outside of the community prior to high school graduation for example, through

travel, reading about distant places, the Internet and their relationships with family outside of the

community. Youth who successfully acquire mobility capital he called floaters. Floaters have the

ability to navigate a variety of social spaces in their rural community and tend not to experience tension or stress when planning a future that will take them away from home. These youth were likely to describe their community as boring and safe and described leaving as what was expected of them. They experienced little sadness when contemplating leaving home because their sense of space and place extended outside of the community. These youth were also most likely to have the cultural and economic capital to achieve their ambitions.

A second group of youth participants expressed a sense of grief and loss when contemplating their departure from their home community. For this group the possibility of leaving created significant stress, so much stress, that they were willing to stay. These youth expressed the opinion that it was more appealing to have the security of knowing their surroundings, occasional work, and family support rather than moving to an unknown place to pursue their dreams. Corbett described this group as making use of what he referred to as "localized capital," which included local social networks, cultural capital appropriate for the local setting, and economic capital linked to local markets and economies.

There was also a third group. For this group of youth leaving their home community was akin to a fantasy or dream that would never come true. These youth had difficulties imagining future possibilities that extended beyond high school or their specific geographic locale. These youth did not possess mobility or localized capital and as a result felt trapped.

Discussion

The lives of rural youth remain under-investigated. This is in part due to their smaller numbers relative to urban and suburban youth, but is exacerbated by the lack of agreement about what it means to be rural. Furthermore, even when rural areas are categorized according to size, population density and distance to services, they still remain largely disparate based upon geographical location, histories, local economies, and demographics. This presents a challenge

when trying to create a body of literature that "explains" the affects of rurality on youth development.

Despite these challenges, I have identified cumulative findings in the literature that informed the design of my study. In my focused review I highlighted research that explored how contexts matter for rural youth. This includes micro level contexts in their day-to-day lives as well as macro level contexts, such as political, social, and economic conditions, which affect rural places. These studies illustrate how multiple interconnected factors in rural environments influence youth as they imagine their futures, construct identities, and negotiate the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

An analysis of this collective work reveals that, for some youth, rural environments create conditions that protect them from an idle pathway (Elder & Conger, 2000; Hodge et al., 2001; Larson & Dearmont, 2002; Chan & Elder, 2001). Intergenerational ties to the land, attachment to family, and cultural practices in rural communities contributed to positive youth development and a strong connection to place, which strengthened youths' desire to engage in rural community life. Even in the studies that showed how rural places limited youth aspirations for educational attainment and narrow career choices (Hektner, 1998; Howley, 2006; Burnell, 2003), youth's decisions to remain in their home community were often driven by a satisfaction with a rural lifestyle and a strong desire to remain close to family and friends. Their choices to stay in their home community did not indicate an intention to disengage but rather a commitment to stay connected. For many youth staying rural meant becoming productive members of rural societies, through raising a family, participating in community life, and contributing to the local economy.

The literature also provided examples of features of rural places that may contribute to idleness. For example, geographical isolation and struggling local economies resulted in rural

youth feeling pressured to leave their home community behind in order to pursue education and employment opportunities (Corbett, 2007). While some youth were prepared for this departure, others struggled with the decision to leave their home community, and instead, decided to remain rural, even though they believed the community could not sustain them through their adult life. This experience left youth feeling frustrated and trapped. Similarly, MacTavish and Salamon (2006) highlighted how institutional practices in a rural area of Illinois marginalized low-income youth from academic and community life, which affected their developmental trajectories. While the authors included in the review did not use the term idle, their description of youth "floundering" or inability to imagine futures beyond high school seems relevant to idle pathways.

Finally, several studies illustrate how rural youth are negatively impacted by broader contexts in which the rural areas are embedded. For example, Kraack and Kenway (2002) showed that changing economies and shifting demographics in Australia contributed to youth being perceived as problematic by adults. And Jones (2002) explained how youth were marginalized in schools and community activities because of immigration occurring in a specific region of Wales. This literature emphasizes how problems rural youth experience are the result of political, social and economic conditions outside of the local area. These findings stress the importance of looking beyond local contexts to understand the factors that affect youth development.

This dissertation extends these findings in three ways. First, I examined a region of the United States not yet documented in academic research. As is evident from the results discussed above, youth in rural areas may have remarkably different experiences depending on local conditions and the history of the rural place. Although I encountered many of the same macro

contextual factors examined in the aforementioned studies, I found some variation due to the uniqueness of the rural place under investigation.

Second, I drew upon tools from sociocultural theory to identify the contextual features of a rural environment that contributed to the construction of youth's social identities. Ethnographic research enabled me to illustrate how identities were formed and how youth responded to being positioned as undesirable or unproductive members of the community. More specifically, I focus on how the social and organizational practices of adult community members contributed to youth idleness. With few exceptions, prior work has not taken this approach to understand the process of identity construction in rural places.

Third, to help me understand how idle identities were constructed in a rural place, I engaged youth as researchers. All of the studies included in my focused review involved young people as participants, but their involvement was limited to sharing perspectives and experiences through interviews and surveys. While having youth voices present in a study about youth is essential, and is the first step toward "authorizing" their perspectives in academic research (Cook-Sather, 2002), a more active way to involve young people is to engage them as researchers. In this study, teenagers influenced the focus of this investigation by helping me to focus on aspects of growing up rural that mattered most to youth. Youth participated in every stage of the research process including framing the issue, data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Overview

In this study I conceptualize idleness as a socially constructed identity mediated by individuals' relationships to people and places in a rural context. The framework for this investigation draws from three theories: sociocultural theory, theories of place, and ecological systems theory. A sociocultural approach to identity development directs me to examine youth interactions within multiple contexts in youth's immediate environment and provides analytic tools to investigate how social interactions shape identities. The construct "place identity," serves to expand the sociocultural approach to include how the physical environment influenced identity formation. And ecological systems theory guides me to consider how relationships, events, and patterns within systems beyond a young person's immediate environment influenced youth development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Together these theories formed a framework that guided me to investigate how youths' social identities were formed in relationship to social and economic conditions and were influenced by physical features of a rural place. I examine how layers of context shaped the construction of identities and how these identities impacted developmental pathways. Before detailing each component of the theoretical framework for this project I define social identity.

Social Identity

Adolescence is a critical stage of human development. It involves creating a stable foundation on which youth build their future, develop a clear sense of themselves, acquire skills, develop beliefs, and create social connections that will help them transition successfully into adulthood. It is widely accepted that one of the major developmental tasks for adolescents is forming an identity both at the personal and social levels (Erikson, 1968; Zarrett & Eccles,

2006). During this time, youth seek answers to questions such as: Who am I? What do I believe? What will my future look like? And how do I fit into the world around me?

Developing an identity is often portrayed as an individual process, in which an autonomous individual chooses from a set of values or beliefs and makes use of resources to design her own future. Erikson (1968) defined identity as a combination of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs and movement towards an anticipated future chosen by the individual: a process of locating oneself in society. Although he acknowledged the role of social influences, he viewed identity development primarily as an individual psychological process, the development of a sense of self, formed in relationship to the external world (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). This concept of identity has been especially useful to researchers who investigate the psychological well being of youth and position individuals as the units of analysis.

In this study, however, I take the perspective that youth identity formation is a social and cultural process (Holland et al., 1998; Vadeboncoeur, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective suggests the process of identity formation is not based solely upon individual choices and behaviors but is rather a process significantly influenced by a set of interrelated processes that are social and cultural (Wortham, 2005). The difference between personal and social identity helps to explain this distinction. The development of a personal identity is the process of self-reflection on individual talents and weaknesses along with one's tendencies for certain behaviors and attitudes. Defining one's personal identity answers the question, who am I? Social identity, however, is the process by which youth begin to see beyond the boundaries of their personal experiences and locate themselves as part of a larger collective with a specific history and a projected future. It is related to the way youth perceive their own agency to alter history and affect social conditions for all members of society, including themselves (Erikson, 1968; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Developing a social identity entails deriving a sense of one's self

based on membership and activities within various societal groups. It is developing an understanding of who one is in relationship to others.

The social identity development literature considers a wide range of identities that are constructed and negotiated during adolescence. These include gender (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001), ethnicity, (Phinney, 1989), race, (Jackson & Stewart, 2001) and sexuality (Sadowski, 2003). Other identity domains that are also thought to contribute to a person's social identity include: moral (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003), sociopolitical (Watts et al., 2003), civic (Rubin, 2007), and academic (Wortham, 2004). In addition, scholars theorize about the intersections of plural identities, such as that between racial and academic identities (Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Ogbu, 1978). Comparatively, there are few studies that explore the significance of place or geographic locale on identity development (Corbett, 2007). In the next sections, I describe how I draw from three related theories to understand how social identities were constructed in a rural place.

A Sociocultural Approach to Identity

One approach to understanding identity, which views identity as a social and cultural object, is associated with G.H. Mead. A Meadian identity is "a sense of oneself as a participant in the social roles and positions defined by a specific, historically constituted set of social activities" (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007, p.104). Instead of viewing identities as formed by individuals, Mead conceptualized identities as collectively formed by society. Individuals, he asserted, then organize themselves in the name of an identity by taking up or actively internalizing the activities and behaviors that have meaning to these socially produced identities. Thus social identities are created through activity and may exist only in worlds in which they are recognized. Those who approach identity in a Meadian way are interested in how individuals internalize social cues and the effect this has on motivation, action, and agency in the roles and positions assumed in society (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Researchers who employ this

approach examine social and cultural practices in multiple contexts, over multiple time scales as the unit of analysis.

In this dissertation, I argue that the process of youth becoming idle is synonymous with developing a social identity. I adopt a Meadian approach and seek to understand the ways idleness was constructed in a rural community. In a sociocultural approach to identity, much attention is paid to how identities are formed in activity, in socially constructed spaces (Urrieta, 2007). Therefore I examine the social and institutional practices within two domains of youths' lives: school and community. In the school domain I focused on programs and supports that were designed to support youth at risk of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD's), becoming enmeshed in the juvenile justice system or leaving high school without a diploma. In the community domain I concentrated on public spaces such as parks and community events, in which youth convene without the direct supervision of adults, as well as local commercial areas where there were opportunities to interact with adults.

A sociocultural approach to identity offered three useful concepts to understand how youth identities were formed in schools and communities in a rural locale: positioning, thickening, and authoring. Next, I explain each concept.

Positioning

Wortham (2004) defines positioning "as an event of identification, in which a recognizable category of identity gets explicitly or implicitly applied to an individual in an event that takes place across seconds, minutes, or hours" (p.166). Positioning refers to what happens when people react to signs or symbols that are associated with a model of identity, or kind of person, that is recognizable in a specific context. For example, "idle youth," "juvenile delinquent," or "drop out." The models of identity individuals are called to occupy are not individually constructed but are rather defined in social contexts through social interactions and activities.

Bakhtin (as cited by Wortham 2004) asserted, "Individuals and groups do not create unique categories de novo, but must instead rent categories from the society in order to make sense of themselves and others" (p.167). The process of positioning requires that models of identity individuals are called to occupy are meaningful at the event level as well as relevant in widely circulating public models of identity (Wortham, 2005).

Examples of positioning often illustrate how a young person is silenced or ostracized in a social setting (Wortham, 2004). But this concept can also be used to illustrate how adults legitimize or empower young people. For example, in prior work I used this notion of positioning to analyze how elders supported young people who were speaking out about their school being closed. Five youth of color spoke at a podium to express their anger, sadness, and disappointment with a district's decision to close their high school. During the meeting, three ministers delivered speeches and used language to compare student protests to civil rights youth activists. This discourse served to position these young people as "engaged citizens" struggling for change in their community and situated the day-to-day experiences of youth within a larger social-historical context of race relations in the United States.

Thickening

When individuals are consistently identified as a particular kind of person, in a specific context, it may solidify an identity. This process is called the "thickening" of identity (Holland & Lave, 2001). Unlike positioning, which is a process that takes place over seconds or minutes, the thickening of an identity happens across multiple timescales, both in an individual's life and through generations, and across specific events in multiple contexts. Thickening an identity requires various individuals to draw on multiple resources to stabilize an identity in a given context. For example, Wortham (2004) describes how, over the course of an academic school year, Tyisha, a ninth grade student, developed from being a "good" student to being an "outcast."

Using ethnographic description and micro discourse analysis, he documents how the teacher and students drew on sociohistorical models, institutional practices, classroom behaviors, and the curriculum to consistently position Tyisha as a "disruptive adolescent who struggles against adults" (p. 168). Tyisha, herself, participated in this process of thickening her social identity as a difficult and oppositional student. In this example Wortham explicates how a student's identity was thickened in a single context—a classroom over the course of an academic year. But thickening can also occur as individual identities are stabilized across contexts over longer periods of time, an approach, which I take in this dissertation.

In prior research, theorists have used the concepts positioning and thickening to demonstrate how identities, recognizable by society, become attached to individuals in a specific event or moment as well as over time and across contexts until an identity becomes stabilized. In this study, I employ these concepts similarly but show how these processes unfold in such a way that they are not mutually exclusive. For example, after an initial positioning event in which a young person is called to occupy a particular role in a specific context, a teenager could be repeatedly positioned in the same way, which results in the thickening of his identity. Although these are distinct terms, they are related because repeated positioning events act to thicken youth identities.

Authoring

The process of navigating a position or identity that one has been called to occupy is called authoring (Holland, et al., 1998). The concept of authoring underscores that positioning is not wholly deterministic and explains how individuals enact personal agency in social interactions by accepting, resisting or negotiating the identity (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). Individual responses to being positioned may be consistent with or may be in opposition to the roles offered; in some cases, individuals construct selves in creative ways. For example, an individual

may choose to embrace the identity but change the trajectory of participation, through behavior and actions, and recreate what it means to occupy a particular role. The process of authoring indicates people have the capacity to make and remake themselves in relationship to the social structures and resources available in a cultural setting (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007).

By studying talk and moment-to-moment interactions, scholars have examined how student identities are constructed in classroom contexts (Wortham, 2004; Leander, 2002; Jurow, 2005; Boaler & Greeno, 2000). These scholars used micro discourse analysis to identify the choices individuals made in the moment they were positioned, such as the dialect used, movements or gestures expressed, and the emotions and relationships negotiated. Other scholars, however, describe how individuals author selves by attending to more macro level interactions such as behaviors and participation in a variety of activities in contexts beyond the classroom. For example, Cahill et al. (2008) describe how a group of young women of color resisted negative social identities pushed upon them by their schools and society. They did this by creating an advertising campaign in their New York City neighborhood. In the campaign, the youth designed "stereotype stickers," which featured stereotypes about young women of color such as "a burden to society" and "uneducated." The youth posted these stickers all over their neighborhood in order "to provoke the public in general into rethinking these stereotypes" (p. 117). The campaign generated dialogue in the community about stereotypes. Through this action youth resisted a negative social identity by challenging the publicly circulating model of what it meant to be a young woman of color in this neighborhood and redefined their sense of self.

In this dissertation, I utilize these three concepts to understand the models of identity that were available to youth in this rural place and examine how youth were positioned by themselves and others. I explore how identities were thickened through social and organizational practices and how rural youth responded to being positioned as particular type of youth in their

community. Similar to Cahill et al. (2008), instead of focusing on micro interactions, I examine patterns of social interaction and identity construction that participants reported occurred over months and years.

While a sociocultural approach explains how identities are "formed on intimate and social landscapes through time" (Holland, et al., 1998, p.285), it does not, however consider the influence of physical environments on developing identities. To understand why rural youth were more likely to be idle than their urban counterparts, I incorporate a theory that guides me to examine how the features of the physical environment matter to identity formation.

Place-Identity

Gieryn (2000) defines place as a geographic location or unique spot in the universe, consisting of physical stuff (e.g. natural or artificially created objects) that has an established history, identity or memory. Places are spaces with people, practices, objects, and representations; and are not merely a setting or a backdrop, but an "agentic player" in the game—a force with detectable and independent effects on social life" (p.466).

Place has been contemplated by scholars across a variety of disciplines including architecture, anthropology, sociology, education, psychology and cultural studies. In educational research, it has received much attention in discussions about place-based or place-conscious education, which is concerned with how place is relevant to the lives of students and teachers. Place-based education aspires to create opportunities for students and teachers to engage in meaningful ways with local settings. Gruenewald (2003) advocates for what he calls "badly needed conversations about the relationship between schools and the places where we live our lives" across five dimensions of place: perceptual, sociological, ideological, political and ecological (p. 623). These dimensions, he argues, demonstrate that places are pedagogical and are therefore, useful units of analysis for researchers. He makes a strong argument for why

educational institutions can no longer ignore the settings where they reside because of the impact place has on the learning that occurs in schools and who we are as learners. He writes,

> Places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further places make us: As occupants of particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped (p.621).

Social and environmental psychologists who study place assert that the physical world plays an important role in identity development (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). According to Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996), there are two ways place has been related to identity development in academic literature. The first is through place identifications or defining a group of people by their location. For example, a person from New York may refer to herself as a New Yorker. In this sense place is seen as a social category. The second way is through place-identity.

Proshansky et al., (1983) define place-identity as a cluster of cognitions that are related to the physical settings in which an individual resides. These cognitions, such as ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, and conceptions of behavior become part of what the authors refer to as the "cognitive backdrop," which shapes people's day-to-day experiences and serve as a resource for making sense of the world and their place in it (p.66). The construct place-identity suggests physical settings and their properties are directly relevant to the social and cultural processes that take place in a given locale, which includes identity formation. Place-identity assumes that forming an identity is not limited to "making distinctions between oneself and significant others, but extends with no less importance to objects and things, and the very spaces and places in which they are found" (p. 57). In other words, identity is constructed through interactions with one's physical environment and not just in relationship to people and society.

Basso (1996) illustrated how interactions with the physical environment played an

important role in the identity development of Western Apache Indian youth. He explained a culturally-rooted, place-based process intended to guide individual youth behavior and support identity development. The process made use of historical narratives and geographical "place names" located within the local environment and was meant to instill beliefs and practices of the local Apache culture in youth. For example, Basso tells the story of a young Apache woman who attended a wedding ceremony without observing the custom of traditional dress for women. Weeks later, in another public setting, her grandmother tells a historical tale about a character who behaved too much like a white man and suffered consequences. The young woman, understanding the historical meaning of this story, recognized and reflected upon her own conduct at the ceremony and took action to change her behavior. Later, she acknowledged that while the story made her aware of her immediate behavior it was the geographical location, the particular landmark, the place in her community with which the story is associated, that served as a daily reminder of her behavior. When the young woman speaks of the place from the story, she does so in a way that animates the location. She says, "I know that place. It stalks me every day" (p.57).

While Basso's work addresses the important role place played in the socialization of Western Apache youth, few studies mention explicitly the role of physical settings or place in the process of adolescent identity formation. In this dissertation, I explore how the physical setting in a rural area of Colorado shaped youths' day-to-day existence and influenced the construction of youths' social identities. I investigate how characteristics of a rural place affected youth engagement, their sense of belonging, and opportunities for participation in school and community life.

A sociocultural approach directs me to examine how social and cultural worlds influenced the formation of youths' identities. And place-identity extends this approach to

include the role place played in this process. But what happens when systems, shaped by the social, cultural, and physical worlds, outside of an individual's immediate environment, interact or collide? To guide me to consider how interactions that occurred beyond the level of the individual influenced identity development, I employed an ecological perspective as part of my theoretical framework. I believed it was important to attend to the complex social, economic, and political forces that shape the lives of youth.

Ecological Systems Theory

In this research project I adopted the stance that adolescent development must be considered from an ecological perspective and set out to understand how multiple layers of context influenced the construction of an idle identity. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (2006) shaped this study because it makes a strong case for why youth development should be studied by examining the layers of context that affect young peoples lives and illustrates the importance of considering multi-directional influences among various systems. Applying this framework guided me to consider not only youth interactions occurring within a specific context but also the relationships among contexts. For example, instead of solely examining youth participation in programs designed to support at risk youth, I also considered how institutional practices for determining eligibility for these programs affected youth engagement.

The theory defines five systems of influence, each with a graduated distance from a developing individual. The first system, or microsystem, is the layer closest to youth, containing interactions between the young person and her immediate environments such as, family, school or community. The second system, or mesosystem, contains interactions between two of the environments within the microsystem: for example, interactions between parents and teachers. Third is the exosystem. The exosystem is a layer with which youth have no direct interaction yet

interactions within this layer directly affect them, such as teachers with a community-based organization. The fourth system, and the outermost layer, is called the macrosystem. It is comprised of the larger cultural context such as national economies, values and norms, and political structures. The fifth system is the chronosystem, which refers to the dimension of time as it relates to a young person's environment also known as timescales. Elements of time include events throughout a young person's life, changes that occur through maturation, and historic events that affect an individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

According to this framework, the developmental process of forming an identity is impacted by relationships in multiple domains within each nested system, as well as across each system and through time. The model suggests that located in the outermost layers there are complex social, economic, and political forces that impact identity development. In my study, I aimed to focus on the relationships within and amongst several layers. I focused on interactions and events located in the first layer or microsystem such as interactions between youth and teachers or community members and I looked closely at how interactions (that youth were not part of) within broader contexts located in the outermost layers, such as economic shifts and institutional practices, affected identity development. Additionally, I considered the history of the place where my study was situated to understand how changes over time affected the models of identity that were available to youth in this location.

One criticism of the ecological systems theory is that it is overly deterministic. Critics argue that it overemphasizes the influence contexts have on youth development and does not make room for individual agency in human development. The concept of authoring from a sociocultural approach, however, leaves space for individuals to play an active role in their own development.

Summary

In this chapter I presented three theories, which I combined to form the theoretical basis of this dissertation. Each theory offered useful concepts and tools for understanding the social construction of youth identities in a rural place. This theoretical framework focused my study on how youth interact with multiple domains, within nested layers of context, and contributed to my understanding of how these interactions affected the development of a social identity; and how social identities affected trajectories of youth engagement and participation. This framework guided decisions I made while designing the study and influenced data collection and analyses. In the next chapter, I describe the research context and detail how the study was conducted.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear explanation of my research design. I begin with a brief description of the research context. I include a discussion of my relationship to the place and community partner, followed by a description of the setting and the site where the study was situated. Next, I present the methodology of the study including research questions, strategies for data collection, and a detailed account of techniques employed during data analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion about the validity of this work and the strategies I employed to manage threats to my interpretations and explanations.

Research Context

Background

This study was conducted in partnership with Children & Youth Services (CYS) a local community-based organization in a rural county in western Colorado (Pseudonyms are used for all names of people and places). I am not a stranger to this place. I have friends who reside there and have visited regularly (three to four times per year) since 1998. I am acquainted with several social service and youth development professionals in the area and have known Ana, the Managing Director of the CYS, for several years. When I started to plan my dissertation I knew I wanted to design a project focused on rural youth that would make a scholarly contribution but would also be practically relevant for the community in which the study was situated, which is consistent with principles of community-based research. In spring 2008, I approached Ana and explained my interest in exploring how features of rural contexts influence the construction of youths' social identities and asked if her organization had questions not addressed by current literature. She expressed an interest in research that would help her organization better understand the needs of youth at risk of leaving high school prior to graduation and wanted to

know how her organization might be more successful at engaging youth in their programs. This study is the result of the conversations that followed.

Community-based research is a collaborative approach to research that engages both scholars and community members in a systematic investigation about a topic relevant to the community. One of the key principles of community-based research is that partners agree about the goals and strategies of the study (Strand et al., 2003). Consistent with this approach, CYS was involved in defining objectives for the study, generated research questions, and played a significant role in the organization of this project (Stoecker, 1999). Goals for this project were threefold: to contribute to the academic literature about rural youth; to gather information that will inform the future design and delivery of CYS programs for youth at risk of long term disconnection; and to create an opportunity for this rural county's most disengaged youth to investigate their worlds through a participatory action research project. CYS provided access to youth participants in a rural community and a program site for me to collect dissertation data. In return, I directed a summer research institute that employed nine youth to conduct a participatory action research project and made recommendations to CYS about its youth programming based on my study.

Setting

Blue River County. Blue River County (BRC) is located in Colorado and is situated within the central Rocky Mountains. It is geographically isolated between the towering 14,000 ft peaks of the Goliath Range to the west and the heavily forested Firefly Range to the east. BRC encompasses the incorporated towns of Cielos Claros (population 2100) and Pocas Calas (population 475), and the city of Mariposa (population 5500). It is not adjacent to a metropolitan area. With a county population of almost 17,000 and a population density of approximately 16

people per square mile, the county is designated as rural (by the BC) and as non-metro (by the OMB) (Colorado Children's Campaign [CCC], 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Hamilton et al. (2008) provide a framework for categorizing disparate rural regions of the United States. The four categories of rural areas include: amenity rich, declining resource-dependent, chronic poverty, and amenity decline. Based on these categories, BRC is considered an amenity rich rural region of the United States. Characterized by natural beauty, wide-open spaces and proximity to recreational areas, amenity rich rural areas are portrayed by Matthews, et al. (2000) as rural idylls and are described as "appearing on postcards or artists' canvases, the rugged mountains, rocky coastlines, deep forests, cool lakes, and other wild, less crowded landscapes" (p.6). During the last thirty years BRC has experienced significant changes that have affected the economic, social, and environmental conditions for its inhabitants. For example, in the 1980's BRC experienced an out-migration and population loss due primarily to the closure of a large mine, yet between 1990 and 2000 it experienced an in-migration. Unlike many rural areas throughout the nation whose populations are dwindling, BRC's population continues to grow at a rate of approximately 4% each year (Johnson, 2006).

In 2007 the demographic profile of BRC was 87% White, 9% Hispanic, 1.7% African American, 1.2% American Indian and 0.4% Asian American (U.S. Census, 2007). Approximately 19% of the BRC youth population lived in poverty, which is 5% higher than the state average and has increased every year since 2002 (CCC, 2008).

The community partner. CYS is a community-based prevention organization. It provides a variety of services to youth and families with multiple needs and has grown significantly since it opened its doors in 2006. In its first year, CYS served 85 residents as compared to 2008 when CYS provided service to 270 individuals. One of their programs, YouthWorks Inc. (YWI) targets youth ages 13 to 18 who have either self-identified or have been

identified by school officials and guardians as "at risk" of not completing high school due to: high rates of absenteeism, failing grades, lack of educational progress, disciplinary referrals, substance abuse, suspensions, and/or expulsion at school. YWI programs are offered year round and combine prevention education, community service opportunities, and a multitude of alternative activities designed to engage youth. Many are school-based and are situated in BRC public school classrooms.

CYS agreed to support the study and permitted me to observe their YWI programs, interview staff, and use their facilities for interactions with youth participants. They also sponsored a youth participatory action research component. Nine youth and two adult staff (the YWI Coordinator and I) designed and implemented a project investigating the role of the community in the lives of disengaged youth. Sponsorship included a $20,000 budget, a staff member to co-facilitate the institute, and overall programmatic support such as liability insurance, supplies, youth stipends, copies, etc.

Site selection. BRC has two separate public school districts designated as rural by NCES. The Mariposa district serves the southern half of the county and the Cielos Claros district covers the northern section of the county. We decided to situate the youth research component in the Cielos Claros district for several reasons. The primary reason for choosing Cielos Claros was that the BRC alternative high school is located there. The alternative school enrolls students from throughout the county, as well as from surrounding rural counties. It is specifically designed for youth who have exited the "regular" or "traditional" high schools without a diploma, either due to dropping out or expulsion, and chose to return to school to complete their education. Partnering with the alternative school provided initial access to youth who have experienced idleness, a meeting place for the summer program, and use of computers and the Internet. Figure

1 provides an organizational chart showing the relationships amongst the CYS programs and indicates groups of youth directly involved in the study.
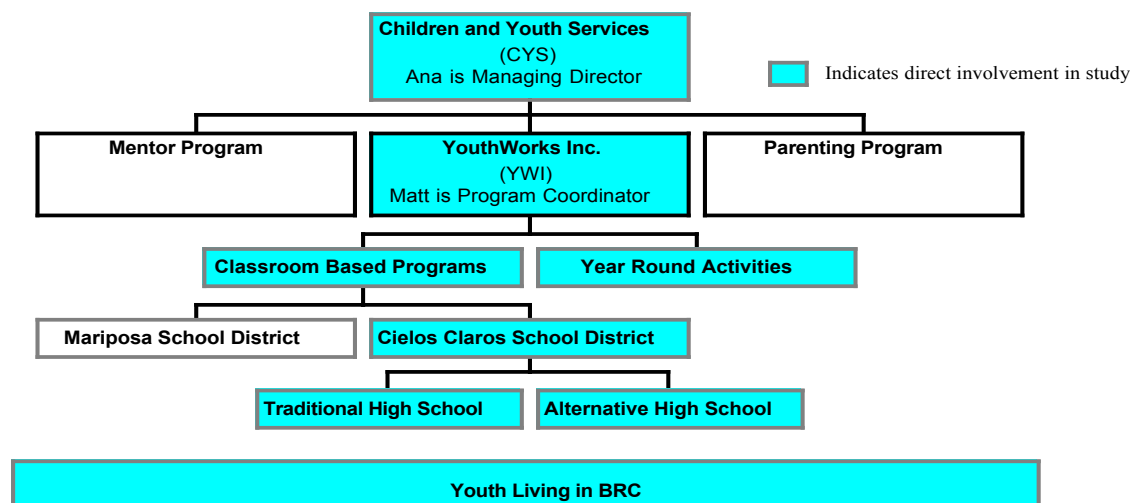
Figure 2: CYS organizational chart that illustrates groups of youth directly involved in the study.

A second reason for locating the youth research component in Cielos Claros was to address the perception that BRC officials neglect the town. According to CYS leadership, the majority of services are located in the southernmost part and most populated area of the county. In order to take advantage of these services, Cielos Claros residents must make a 30-minute drive to Mariposa. The project was welcomed by the school district, law enforcement, and other youth service providers located in the northern part of the county. Finally, according to the Colorado Department of Education, the 2008 high school graduation rates in Cielos Claros were lower than the Mariposa district at 80% and 89% respectively. This lead to curiosity on the part of some adults who worked in the district; they were eager to hear about youth experiences in the high schools.

Participants. Participants for this study were selected purposefully. Individuals were invited to participate either because they were youth who had personal experiences with risk

factors associated with idleness and long term disconnection or because they were adults who had developed expertise from interacting with these youth. One hundred and fifty-two BRC residents participated: 129 youth and 23 adults.

   Youth participants. Youth participants were recruited either from YWI programs or from the general population of BRC based on their role in the study. For example, youth researchers were recruited from YWI programs, and youth participants who completed surveys or participated in focus groups conducted by the youth researchers, were recruited from the general population of BRC. The initial plan was to gather perspectives primarily from youth who were identified as currently disengaged or at risk of long-term disconnection. But the goals of the youth participatory action research component of the project and their focus on reputations, which I detail later in this chapter, expanded recruitment efforts to also include youth who were considered engaged and connected to school or community life. The result was a youth sample that represented a broad spectrum of engagement in the community.

   One hundred-twenty nine youth ages 13 to 20 participated. Sixty-six percent of the youth responded to surveys, 24% were involved in focus groups, and 10% were interviewed. They represented youth enrolled in school grades 8 to 12, youth not currently attending school, and youth who had obtained their GED. Thirty five percent of youth participants reported having a "good" reputation, 47% reported having a "bad" reputation, and 18% said they were unsure what kind of reputation they had in their community. Youth participants' ethnicity closely mirrored the county demographic profile with 85% of the youth self-reporting as White, 12% as Hispanic, 2% as Native American and 1% as African American. Table 3 provides demographic information about the youth participants.

Table 3

Youth participant data n=129.

	Youth Participants Number	Youth Participants %
Gender		
Male	63	49
Female	61	47
Unreported	5	4
Race/Ethnicity		
White	109	85
Hispanic	15	12
Native American	3	2
African American	2	1
Age		
20	4	3
19	9	7
18	23	18
17	25	19
16	37	28
15	19	15
14	6	5
13	4	3
Unreported	2	1
Last grade completed		
GED	12	9
12	22	17
11	23	18
10	45	35
9	17	13
8	8	6
Unreported	2	2

Adult participants. Twenty-three adults were recruited to participate in this study. Adult participants were chosen because they had experience working with BRC youth at risk of idleness or long-term disconnection in multiple contexts such as youth development programs, schools, ministry, athletics, juvenile justice, and social services. Specific adults within each context were invited to participate in the study after being identified during conversations with youth and other adults. For example, if youth routinely mentioned a particular adult I made it a point to attempt to recruit and consent the adult.

Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity was paramount in this study. To protect the identity of consented individuals, I used pseudonyms for all participants. In addition, I have not written in-depth portraits of youth researchers or provided details about the professional identities of adults who I interviewed. Although the quotes and narratives included in this document are accurate, minor details have been altered to maintain confidentiality.

Methodology

This dissertation combines a participatory research approach with elements from qualitative traditions such as ethnography and grounded theory. Each aspect of the design was chosen because it is particularly well suited for helping me understand and interpret the influence context has on youth and the process through which idle identities are constructed in a rural place (Maxwell, 2005). In this section, I discuss how I blended aspects of each tradition to conduct the study.

Youth Participatory Action Research

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) is research conducted by youth with the goal of affecting and/or evaluating communities, programs, agencies and systems that have been created to serve young people (Rubin & Jones, 2007). In YPAR youth have the opportunity to define and study problems that affect their lives and take action to solve these problems.

YPAR scholars argue it is inaccurate to define YPAR as a research method because most YPAR teams employ a variety of methods, drawing from both qualitative and quantitative traditions, based upon the goals and questions guiding the research (Kirshner, 2010; Fine 2008). According to Fine (2008), YPAR is more accurately defined as an "epistemological challenge to the traditions of social science, most critically on the topic of where knowledge resides" (p. 215). Projects with youth as researchers invite young people to be part of larger conversations about policy and practice, and encourage youth to start defining the terms of those discussions (Cook-

Sather, 2002).

In this study, YPAR was employed as a strategy of inquiry. It was well suited for this project because it is a process geared specifically toward understanding how "social interactions form and reform individuals" (Creswell, 2005, p. 556). Additionally, one of the essential characteristics of this strategy includes seeking to understand how macro level social forces contextualize social events and interactions (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Employing YPAR as a strategy for this dissertation was collaborative, practical, and engaged youth as knowledgeable agents in the production of scholarly work about their lives and about programs designed specifically for youth.

YPAR scholars provide three rationales for employing youth as researchers relevant to this study. First, in YPAR, youth are viewed as experts about their own lives and about issues affecting young people: they are "legitimate and essential collaborators" (Morrell, 2008, p. 158). Their insider status helps develop a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the issue under investigation and strengthens the ecological validity of the study (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, in press).

Second, engaging youth, particularly marginalized and disconnected youth, challenges assumptions about who holds power and produces knowledge in society (Cammarota, & Fine, 2008; Cook-Sather, 2002). Rather than adults speaking for youth, young people tell their own stories. It creates space for various ways of seeing and interpreting the experiences of rural youth. Morrell (2008) describes YPAR as an important tool because it "affirms youth as transformative intellectuals and involves important and often neglected populations in the process of collecting and distributing information"(p. 159).

A third rationale for utilizing YPAR in educational research is that it creates opportunities for students to participate in meaningful ways and promotes youth development (Mitra, 2004).

Participation increases connection to school communities, builds resiliency in the face of adversity, and encourages civic/democratic involvement (Benard, 2004). London et al. (2003), in their review of youth-led research, describe three categories of benefits for youth when participating in YPAR: increased skills and knowledge (e.g. increased academic skills and job readiness); development of social capital (e.g. new relationships with youth or adults that may help with future educational and/or employment opportunities); and identity exploration (e.g. opportunity to take on new roles in academic and/or civic settings).

Engaging youth as researchers is an uncommon practice. It has, however, grown significantly in the past decade and has been used successfully in a variety of fields such as education (Jones & Yonezawa, 2002; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, under review), sociology (Collatos & Morrell, 2002), substance abuse prevention (Sly et al., 2001; Ozer et al., 2008), and community planning and development (Sabo Flores, 2008; Chawla & Driskell, 2006; Kirshner, 2006).

During the five years prior to beginning my dissertation, I gained valuable experience that prepared me to successfully incorporate YPAR into this project. In 2006, I managed a summer project for Boulder County Prevention in which 12 youth investigated why their peers engaged in high-risk behaviors. In 2008, I consulted with a group of Denver public school students during their examination of climate issues in several middle schools. And I assisted Dr. Ben Kirshner during a two-year YPAR study that explored the impact of a school closure on students in an urban school district. Additionally, I spent two semesters as a research assistant and co-facilitator for EDUC 4800: Community-Based Research (CBR) for Youth Development. While not technically a YPAR project, experiences in this class contributed significantly to my expertise and ability to conduct community-based research, facilitate skill building workshops, and coach novice researchers.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative dissertation was to explore how idle youth identities were constructed in a rural community. I set out to understand how social interactions and rural places influence idleness and how services and programs designed to support youth at risk of long-term disconnection, either promote engagement or contribute to further withdrawal from academic and community life. The questions that guided this study were:

1. How are idle identities constructed in a rural community?

   (a) How do interactions with adults and institutional practices work to construct or deconstruct idle identities?

   (b) How do rural youth embrace, resist, or alter idle identities?

   (c) How does being in a rural place influence the construction of an idle identity?

2. What can rural communities do to prevent idleness?

To answer these questions, I observed people in a multiple contexts in a rural community and examined the social practices of groups designed to support youth at risk of disconnection. I also enlisted the help of youth.

Youth researchers helped me to answer my research questions by implementing a study of their own. This youth research project, detailed in the next section, first identified youth *reputations* as an important part of growing up in BRC that affected youth engagement. There were two questions that guided the youth research project: How do reputations affect youth in BRC? How does living in a small town affect youth drug and alcohol use? These questions did not replace my questions but rather helped me to understand disconnection from a youth perspective. The work that youth completed provided me with a youth-generated conceptual framework that influenced the direction of this dissertation.

Youth researchers defined a reputation as "an image or way you are viewed by others" which is similar to the concept of a social identity. Youth researchers also discussed how a "bad" reputation could result in decreased access to social supports, education and employment opportunities in the community, which sounded related to idleness. As I explored reputations and how they operated in BRC, I started to see connections between being positioned as a "bad kid" and idle youth identities. This linkage became particularly evident during my analysis of how youth responded to being labeled a "bad kid," because one of the ways youth responded to this label was to purposefully disconnect from academic and community life.

Summer Research Institute

The Summer Research Institute (SRI) was the YPAR component of this study. SRI took place during the summer of 2009 and was designed as an eight-week, paid internship[1] for nine youth, ages 13 to 18, who resided in BRC. Matt (YouthWorks program coordinator for CYS) and I co-facilitated the institute.

Recruiting youth. Youth were recruited for the nine co-researcher positions during the spring semester of 2009 from YWI program sites and classes. In April 2009[2] I delivered short presentations to several groups of students and explained that I was a doctoral student at University of Colorado who had designed a research project to learn more about what it was like to grow up in a rural place like BRC. I told them that I was especially interested in learning about the lives of young people who did not feel engaged in school and community life and wanted to understand aspects of BRC that contributed to this experience. To accomplish this goal, I was looking for a team of youth who wanted to share their perspectives and expertise about this topic.

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[1] Youth researchers could earn up to $1000 in a stipend.

[2] Following the advice of teachers, counselors and youth development staff we purposely waited until April to recruit for SRI. April is the last month of school in BRC and by this time most students have made plans for the summer (e.g. jobs, travel, camps). We waited for this time to purposefully recruit youth who would otherwise have no plans.

I then described what participation in the project might look like, answered questions, and made applications available to interested youth. I also spoke to teachers, counselors, and youth development staff about the project and asked them to pass on the applications on to FWI youth they believed might be interested or positive additions to the team.

The application process had three components: a written application, a recommendation form, and an interview. The written application asked for general information (i.e. name, age, contact information), and posed five open-ended short answer questions. The recommendation form provided a brief description of the project and space for an adult to explain why they recommended the youth to be part of SRI. The adult needed to be someone whom the youth thought knew them well and would support their desire to be part of SRI. We received 16 completed applications.

Each applicant was invited to participate in a 30-minute interview. During the interview, my co-facilitator and I detailed the project and job description and encouraged each candidate to talk about two things: why they were interested in the project and what they thought they could do to make the project a success. Ultimately we chose youth who planned to be present through the summer, made the most compelling case for why they should be part of the project, and demonstrated interest in youth voice or learning research skills. For example, one applicant wrote in his application:

> I would love to be a youth researcher because I want to hear the opinions of other kids that I don't kno or have not herd from yet. Plus I believe I will do a great job because I kno most kids in BRC and I can learn how to do anything if you give me the chance.

Another candidate, Sarah, explained, "I think being a youth researcher will help me better understand the world, and cause and effect of how things happen." In an attempt to ensure adequate representation, we also considered demographic factors such as gender and location

within the county. The final YPAR team was comprised of five females, four males and

represented the north, south, and central areas of the county. Pseudonyms of the youth

researchers, which I include in the dissertation narrative, were: Sarah, Beth, Angel, Brit, Kat,

Tony, Caleb, Jack, and Mateo.

One challenge we encountered during the recruiting process involved employing transient

or homeless youth because they did not have access to their parents or legal guardians, so it was

difficult for them to acquire required signatures for YWI and IRB consent forms. Due to these

circumstances, we were unable to formally hire these youth so instead we invited them to

participate in interviews or focus groups in exchange for gift cards to local grocery stores.

Youth research. Once a team of youth researchers was assembled, we met

approximately 15 hours per week for eight weeks at the alternative school in Cielos Claros. On

the second day, the YPAR team was briefed about the process of writing a dissertation. I talked

about the topic of rural youth engagement, why I was interested in it, what I learned in my

literature review, and why I designed my dissertation with a YPAR approach. This was

essentially an abbreviated version of my dissertation prospectus minus the theoretical

framework. One aspect I did share about the theoretical basis for the project was that I was

interested in knowing more about contextual factors that influenced youth engagement. I also

emphasized the value of youth voice and reiterated CYS's intention to create structures in which

youth can communicate with county officials and participate in designing or improving services

for BRC teenagers. The youth researcher role, I explained, was to provide expertise about this

topic based on their lived experiences; to use what they knew about BRC to investigate aspects

of the community that either fostered or prevented youth engagement; and deliver their findings.

Once the YPAR team was informed about the general parameters of the SRI project they

planned their investigation. To begin this process, the group participated in a guided brainstorm

activity to identify aspects of BRC they believed played a role in youth becoming disengaged from school and academic life. During the activity, the team engaged in spirited conversations about obstacles to engagement and debated the "roots" or origins of these problems and discussed the difference between examining the role of individual actions versus examining the role of context. Figure 3 shows the concept map the group created during this activity.

Figure 3. Concept map created during "The Problem Tree" brainstorming activity.

Youth researchers discussed, debated, and refined their ideas about aspects of BRC that influenced youth engagement for several hours. After careful consideration about obstacles facing young people in BRC they decided on two general topics and formulated questions for their summer investigation. As explained earlier, questions generated by youth researchers did not supplant my original research questions. Instead, the questions, data, and findings generated by youth researchers helped focus my inquiry. The YPAR process provided a unique opportunity to view the process of becoming idle from a youth perspective. It guided me to think about specific aspects of growing up in BRC that mattered to youth, features of a rural environment not reflected in the literature, and informed data collection and analysis later in the study.

During the eight weeks of the institute, youth were introduced to research concepts and skills through a series of workshops and activities necessary to complete the research process. Topics included an overview of a typical research progression, developing research questions, methods for data collection and analysis, creating effective presentations, and a module about conducting ethical research. At the end of the summer, the team presented results and a list of recommendations to five different groups of adult community leaders. They also participated in a strategic planning session about how to collaborate with adults to incorporate youth voice into BRC. This session was led by a local professional facilitator, who volunteered to help after reading about the project in the newspaper, and the outcome was an action plan document. The document included strategies and next steps toward creating venues for productive dialogue between youth and adults in the community. Later that year, (after my departure from BRC) several youth researchers helped to establish a youth advisory board for FWI and two were invited to participate as part of a planning team for the construction of a new recreational facility.

Halfway through the summer, after data were collected, two youth withdrew from the project. One found full time employment at a local business and explained he had to prioritize full time earnings over the stipend he would receive from the project. The other could no longer attend because he was involved in an incident with law enforcement and was required to serve time in a correctional facility. Although this second youth no longer participated in the YPAR research, he maintained peripheral involvement. He participated in a one-on-one interview with me and in the following year provided feedback during member checks.

Data Collection

Ethnography is a research tradition based on observing people in their environments. Ethnographers provide in-depth portraits of groups being studied and include detailed descriptions of talk, behaviors, interactions, beliefs, and practices of culture-sharing groups

(Creswell, 2005). This study employed a variety of ethnographic methods to collect data between January and December of 2009. Data were collected independently by me as well as with a team of youth researchers. This increased the complexity of my design, yet yielded contextually rich data and a deep understanding of the lives of youth who participated in the study. See Table 4 for a summary of data collected. Next, I detail data sources.

Observations. From April through October 2009 I conducted 212 hours of observation and recorded field notes at a variety of BRC locations. I visited environments specifically designed for youth at risk of long term disconnection such as YWI sponsored programs or activities and alternative school classes and events. I frequented local restaurants, cafes, retail stores, parks and open spaces where youth convened. And I observed public settings where youth participated in community life such as school board meetings, art, music, athletic, and recreation events.

Table 4

Data collection.

Source	Number	Date collected
Observation hours (Documented with field and audio notes)	212	April - October 2009
Youth surveys	86	June 2009
Interviews		April - October 2009
Youth	12	
Adults	17	
Focus groups: (Six)		June - October 2009
Youth	31	
Adults	6	
Artifacts		January 2009 - June 2010
Newspaper articles	232	
Newsletters	12	
Other artifacts	36	

The purpose of the observations was to develop a more thorough understanding of the opportunities youth have for participation and how they engage in community life. I documented

interactions between youth and adults and paid careful attention to discourse about youth. I looked for episodes of positioning, thickening, and authoring as described in my conceptual framework. During many of these observations I was a passive observer and wrote field notes describing the environment, participant interactions and behaviors (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). During other observations, however, I was an active participant riding horses, playing games, and eating pizza with youth, so I waited until after the observation to write detailed notes and reflective memos.

I chose locations based on informal conversations, interviews, or previous observations with youth. For example, if participants frequently referenced a particular place I made it a point to spend time at that location. One exception to this practice was that I chose not to attend "woodsies." A "woodsy" is a gathering in an outdoor space where youth convene to socialize. According to Sarah (a youth researcher), a woodsy is "a big party with a lot of people…like half the kids in the town, there's always alcohol, always cigarettes, always weed. You can get trashed and run around and see what else is out there, because it's interesting, because you're drunk." The gatherings are held in unpopulated spaces, often on public lands, located in between town and the designated wilderness areas that border the county, "Up in the woods where people can't hear you." While there are several regular spots for these gatherings, youth frequently move the location so police cannot easily find the party. I chose not to attend woodsies because I thought it might compromise my relationship with the youth. Youth researchers expressed concern that if I showed up they might be in trouble with their peers for revealing the location; I did not want to betray their trust.

I also documented conversations about school, community, and place among youth researchers at SRI. After most sessions with the youth researchers, during my 30-minute drive back to Mariposa, I dictated notes into a digital recorder. I made audio notes about places youth

mentioned, stories youth told about interactions with adults, general impressions about the progress of the YPAR project, and kept track of emerging questions, or potential interviewees. I recalled specific language youth used to describe aspects of BRC. Throughout the summer I listened to these recordings to recall specific terms or places frequently talked about. This data informed decisions about questions to ask, places to visit, and people to talk to later in the study.

Youth surveys. In June 2009, the YPAR team created a two-page survey and administered it to 86 BRC youth (See Appendix A for YPAR survey). The survey asked for demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, last grade completed, and whether or not the participant was still attending school. In the first section of the survey youth researchers provided a definition of the word reputation, "an image or way you are viewed by others," to invite participants to talk about how they thought they were perceived in t heir community. This definition was followed by 11 open-ended prompts and two multiple-choice questions focused on the topic of reputation. The second section included seven open-ended prompts and two multiple-choice questions that explored youth perspectives about drug and alcohol use in BRC. Youth invited peers to fill out a survey if they met the following criteria: age 13 to 20, resided in BRC and believed individual to have experience with one of the two topics.

Interviews. Between April and October 2009, I conducted 29 semi-structured, intensive interviews with 12 youth and 17 adults. Youth interviews were primarily conducted in public settings such as coffee shops and restaurants; I met with most adults at their offices. Twenty-four interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. At the request of five participants[3], I did not use a recorder and instead wrote detailed notes. While interviews were designed to take approximately 60 minutes, several lasted between 90 and 180 minutes. After we finished talking about items from the protocol, youth researchers often took this opportunity to talk about the

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[3] I do not offer details about the identity of these participants to protect their identity.

YPAR results or their experiences presenting the findings. Adult interviewees were particularly forthcoming once I had turned off the recorder; several used the tail end of our interview as an opportunity to ask about resources (i.e. books, articles, videos about various topics) or to talk about the results of the YPAR study, which had been highly publicized in the community.

Youth interviews. Youth interviewees included eight youth researchers and four youth not involved in the YPAR project. Non-YPAR youth were identified by youth researchers and were introduced to me while I was observing YWI sponsored programs or when I was out in the community.

Interview questions for youth were designed to have youth describe and reflect upon four general areas of everyday life (See Appendix B for examples of interview questions). I started by having the interviewee talk about their individual history, such as how long they have lived in the area, places they have lived (in and out of BRC) and to describe their individual path through school or work situations. Next, I asked about their individual experiences with BRC school and community life. I tried to get a sense of the kinds of organizations, activities, and spaces the interviewee interacted with on a regular basis and their personal experiences during these interactions. I also asked youth to describe the most challenging and favorite aspects of living in BRC. In the third section of the interview, participants were asked to think about the role of youth in BRC. They discussed opportunities for participation and contribution to community life and identified aspects of BRC that either supported or hindered their engagement. They also spoke to whether or not they thought BRC was a "teen friendly" place. Often I included questions about specific interactions, events or language I observed during YWI or YPAR programming and asked interviewees to discuss how they perceived those situations (Carspecken, 1996). Each interview ended with participants talking about suggestions or changes they would like to see in programs, policies, and practices that affect BRC youth.

Adult interviews. Adults were recruited because they had experience interacting with "at risk" youth in a variety of roles and contexts. The adult interview protocol was designed to cover the same four areas as the youth protocol but from an adult perspective. This enabled me to triangulate data around specific issues during analysis. In addition to reflecting on those four areas, adult interviewees were asked to describe their interactions with youth both in their profession as well as a member of the community; and to discuss successes or challenges they experienced working with "at risk" youth. I also was curious to hear adult perspectives about the conditions that lead to youth disengagement and the effectiveness of programs and services designed for idle youth in their community.

Consistent with a grounded theory approach, as the study progressed, interviews became more focused upon what I was learning about BRC youth experiences. I used interviews as opportunities to explore and make sense of recurring themes, concepts, and language (Charmaz, 2006). This helped me to understand which aspects of BRC were most relevant and of concern to youth struggling to remain engaged.

Focus groups. Between June and October 2009, a total of six focus groups were conducted with a total of 37 participants: 31 youth and 6 adults. These groups created a space where participants interacted and discussed aspects of BRC that affected youth engagement in school and community life. Participants talked about their own experiences and reminded each other about events and situations related to the prompts. In this study, focus groups were an effective way to develop an understanding of the issues that mattered to youth because of the topics each group wanted to discuss during the conversations.

Youth researchers conducted two of the focus groups with 16 youth participants recruited from the community. Prompts were informed by data collected through surveys. The YPAR team reviewed a random sample of 30 completed surveys and designed questions to encourage

their peers to tell stories about how having a reputation has affected their life or how aspects of living in BRC has influenced their use of drugs or alcohol (Spradley, 1979).

I conducted four of the focus groups. Three groups involved a total of 15 youth participants recruited from YWI programs; and one group included six adult participants who served as mentors for "at risk" youth. Questions I asked in the groups were drawn from the interview protocols and asked participants to talk about each one of the four areas described in the interview section. Additionally, I shared the findings from the YPAR study and asked focus group participants to talk about whether or not they agreed or what parts of the story might be missing from the YPAR interpretation.

All focus groups were approximately 60 minutes in length, took place at CYS program sites, were audio-recorded and transcribed. CYS staff exited the room before the session began to help encourage participants to talk freely about their experiences with CYS and in the community.

Artifacts. Throughout the study, I collected publicly circulated artifacts that pertained to youth lives in BRC. Artifacts from CYS included YWI program materials (i.e., workbooks, handouts, activity flyers, and invitations), the 2008-2009 organizational annual report, and monthly newsletters published from May 2009 through June 2010.

I collected newspaper articles from three local county newspapers during the time I lived in BRC (May 2009 to October 2009); and I searched the archives of one newspaper. I chose that particular newspaper because it had the largest distribution. Using key word searches for teen, youth, and kids, I identified 232 articles published between January 2009 and January 2010 and reviewed their contents. This process provided valuable insights about ways in which youth were portrayed in a local media source within their community. I also reviewed a monthly column in

this newspaper that was authored by representatives of several local youth development agencies.

Finally, I reviewed documents created by youth researchers during SRI. These included presentation narratives, youth employment applications, and documents prepared during activities in which youth were asked to write about how they perceive their environment or how they make use of community resources (Driskell 2002; Sabo-Flores, 2008).

Data Analysis

In this section I describe my analytic process. I detail strategies and techniques I used to ensure an approach that was systematic and grounded in the data (Creswell, 2005, Maxwell, 2005). I write about the process as three phases, which makes the process appear linear. In practice, however, the process was not linear but iterative as analyses were ongoing and occurred alongside data collection.

Phase one: **Analysis of survey and focus group data with youth researchers.** One challenge experienced in YPAR projects is to make data analysis engaging for youth participants while achieving a level of rigor satisfactory to policymakers and the academic research community (Leyshon, 2002). To mitigate this challenge I introduced research concepts and skills using games and activities, encouraged group dialogue about what youth saw, and created opportunities for YPAR members to help each other make meaning of the data. Most analyses were conducted in small groups or dyads. To ensure systematicity, the YPAR analysis was guided by a grounded theory approach and required youth to review data, identify key elements, formulate categories, and formulate themes within each category.

In June 2009 the YPAR team collaboratively analyzed survey responses and transcripts created from two youth researcher-led focus groups. The process began with the group reading all the surveys and transcripts. Each team member wrote individually about what she or he observed

in the data, made note of emergent stories and patterns, and kept track of questions that occurred during their review. Next, the team worked in pairs to tally survey responses to get a sense of the distribution of responses in the data. During this process youth negotiated with their partners about how responses were similar, created categories, organized data into these categories, and counted responses in each category.

After survey responses had been counted, the group created a list of 10 organizational codes (Maxwell, 2005): types of reputations, consequences of having a reputation, building a reputation (sub codes: relationships with adults, peers and community, and youth behaviors), reasons for using drugs or alcohol, reasons for not using drugs or alcohol, access to drugs or alcohol, attitudes about drugs and alcohol, obstacles to youth engagement, youth suggestions about improving BRC for youth, and interesting quotes (See Appendix C for YPAR coding tree). Next, the group distributed the task of coding amongst all team members. The team worked in pairs to code surveys by applying one code at a time to surveys and focus group transcripts. Once all codes were applied to all the data sources, data for each code was typed into an electronic document. The result was ten electronic files containing all data excerpts coded with a particular code. Then, the group analyzed the electronic files.

To analyze data within each electronic code file, the group reorganized into different pairs and worked collaboratively with their partner to identify themes and patterns in each file. Once clusters of data representing a theme or pattern were created, researchers looked for variation within the cluster. Then, each dyad wrote statements to explain their finding, gathered three excerpts to support their statement and reported out to the larger group. During the report out, youth asked for clarification, questioned, and challenged each finding statement. If an analytic team could not make a compelling case for their interpretation, teams either returned to the data to seek confirming or disconfirming evidence or the interpretation was not included as a

finding. This process acted as multi-tiered reliability check because claims and supporting evidence were constantly being questioned and debated.

The final step in this process was a large group review of the findings. In this step, the YPAR team created large posters that represented each finding, placed them around the room, and spent several days discussing each topic. We looked for relationships and clustered similar findings together. This step required the youth to draw upon their knowledge about their community to make sense of the connections between findings and formulate answers to the questions that guided the research.

The YPAR team presented results from their investigation to five groups of adult community members: a county-wide youth development coalition, a school board, a recreation planning board, clergy leadership, and a state house bill planning committee focused on providing services for youth. Their presentations were organized to explain what the team had learned about why some BRC youth disengage from school or community life and discussed aspects of BRC that contributed to youth drug and alcohol use. The team also delivered recommendations about what BRC community members could do to address these findings. The research team kept track of and discussed audience questions and responses. Because they were presenting to members of the BRC community, they used audience feedback as a resource to check and re-examine their interpretations—similar to member checks. They also used it to address gaps or holes in future presentations and to sharpen and refine their communication about the results of their work.

Phase two: Analysis of interviews, focus groups, observational data, artifacts and surveys. The second phase of analysis took place between June 2009 and June 2010. In this phase I reviewed emerging data, reanalyzed YPAR data, and analyzed data I had collected

independently from the youth. The analytic strategies I employed were also drawn from grounded theory and built upon the work completed by youth researchers.

Reviewing data. Studying data as it was collected was the initial step in the second phase of analysis. I read transcripts, reviewed artifacts, and listened to audio files on a bi-weekly basis. I also wrote short memos. Writing memos was essential to my analytic process and occurred during every phase of analysis. Memos written in the early stages of the study were informal and helped me track key concepts or phrases, suggest possible codes and discover gaps in my data collection. "Place holding" memos provided a space for me to keep track of and explore my ideas about what I was learning while I collected data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 73). These early memos often ended with questions to explore or notes to myself about ideas to pursue either with youth researchers, or in future interviews and focus groups. For example, in one memo I wrote,

> This language: "good kids" and "bad kids," is used by both youth and adult
> participants. But what do they mean? It is such a common expression, it would be easy
> for me to overlook, but it shows up so often in interviews that I need to start asking
> people to explain.

Next, all data were entered into NVIVO software and coded.

Coding. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, data were coded using a multi-level coding process. An initial set of descriptive codes different that the YPAR codes was generated based upon the YPAR findings, early memos, and a careful line-by-line review of a randomly selected sample of data. This original set of 28 inductive codes was designed to fit the data (Charmaz, 2006). Three analysts, unrelated to the project, reviewed the coding structure and provided feedback that helped me to clarify the properties of each code. Next, I piloted the codes by coding a sub-sample of field notes and transcripts. This step helped me develop a general

sense of which codes were most significant or meaningful and led me to remove five irrelevant inductive codes and add three deductive ones derived from my theoretical framework. For example, I created a code titled "identity work" which had three sub codes: resisting, embracing and rewriting. This code helped me to identify instances of authoring. My final coding structure consisted of 21 codes, three of which had multiple sub-codes. Table 5 shows the final coding structure used to code all data.

In the next level of coding, I applied this coding structure to all field notes and transcripts, which helped organize the data into categories. Once separated into categories, I employed constant comparative methods (Creswell, 2005, Glaser, 1992). Constant comparison is an inductive analysis procedure that generates and connects categories by "comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories" (Creswell, 2005, p. 406). The purpose is to develop evidence to support the existence of the category by comparing data from different sources and across time and places (Charmaz, 2006). I compared statements about specific themes in the data within a particular interview then compared statements across interviews and across different groups of participants.

Table 5

Final coding structure.

Code	Description or properties
Activities	Talk about or observations of activities that people (youth & adults) participate in. For example, skiing, smoking, drinking.
Adolescents as a collective	Anytime a speaker or artifact references youth or teenagers as a collective group.
Appearances	Talk about specific external characteristics: For example, clothing, hair color, make up, jewelry, hygiene, piercings or about how people look in general.
Challenges for youth	Problems or challenges youth face in BRC. Can be talk about or moments when youth are struggling.
Cops	Talk about interactions with cops/police or any aspect of law enforcement (lawyers, judges, juvenile justice, etc.).
No code	Data that does not fit into any of the established codes.

Code	Description or properties
Everybody knows everybody: Benefits, Costs, Neutral	Use of the term or reference to this phenomenon. Talk about it being a positive or negative experience; or referencing it in a way that does not connote either but references its existence.
Labels	Names or terms used to describe a groups, or groups, of people (youth or adults) in BRC. Kinds of stereotypes: "good kids," "stoners" "Retirees," etc. Talk can include discussion of these labels or just mentioning the label.
Identity work: Embracing, Resisting, Rewriting	Stories or instances of youth engaged in authoring their identities.
Places	Talk about places. Can be in BRC or outside. Can be towns, cities, hangouts, and businesses. Can be natural (river) or artificial (supermarket). This can also include descriptions of places from field and audio notes.
Reputations	Reputation is broadly conceived here. It can be a "good" or "bad," youth or adults. It can include stories about be about how someone gained or prevented a reputation or the consequences or benefits associated with a reputation. And it can include how reputations were formed.
School	Any talk where school is referenced. This may include, stories about events that occurred at school, descriptions of school, or feelings and thoughts about school.
Social relationships: Capital, Liability	Talk about relationships with people (e.g. family, friends, teachers, police) that are seen as or experienced as beneficial (Capital) or problematic (Liability) to youth in some way. For example, access to resources, supports, or peers.
Solutions	Ideas or suggestions for how to improve BRC for youth. For example, this might include increasing specific services or resources, or strategies to engage youth. Can be from adults or youth.
Stories about tensions	Talk or observations about conflicts or friction between two (or more) groups within the community. For example, retired people do not support the schools, police are out to get youth, adults think kids are bad, youth do not trust adults.
Supporting youth	Any talk or descriptions about ways to support youth from an adult perspective. This can be talk about what they think supports youth or what youth need. It can be telling a story about something that was supportive. It can also be a statement or explanation for a policy, practice or curriculum.
Talk about BRC	Talk or reference to BRC or specific towns in the County. This may include a statement about favorite aspects of growing up here or participant thoughts about why it is a popular location.
Talk about CYS	Anytime participants reference CYS. This might include talk about the organization, people or programming.
Talk about community engagement	Youth talk about being or feeling connected or engaged in any aspect of community life.
Youth feel judged	Talk about how, why, or when youth feel scrutinized or evaluated. This might include feeling judged as an individual or as a member of a social group.
Youth feel supported	Any talk or descriptions about ways to support youth from a youth perspective.

In a third level of coding, I analyzed each category to determine subcategories within each category and to develop an understanding about the relationships amongst subcategories as well as between the subcategories and the main category. This process was similar to what Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to as axial coding which is a strategy for bringing fractured data back together to tell a coherent story about the central phenomenon under investigation. "Axial coding answers questions such as when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences" (as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). This process provided an analytic frame for the data, which helped me reveal what the data had captured about the construction of youths' social identities in BRC. Figure 4 illustrates a condensed version of how I employed axial coding to understand the phenomenon of youth reputations.

Figure 3. Example of axial coding process.
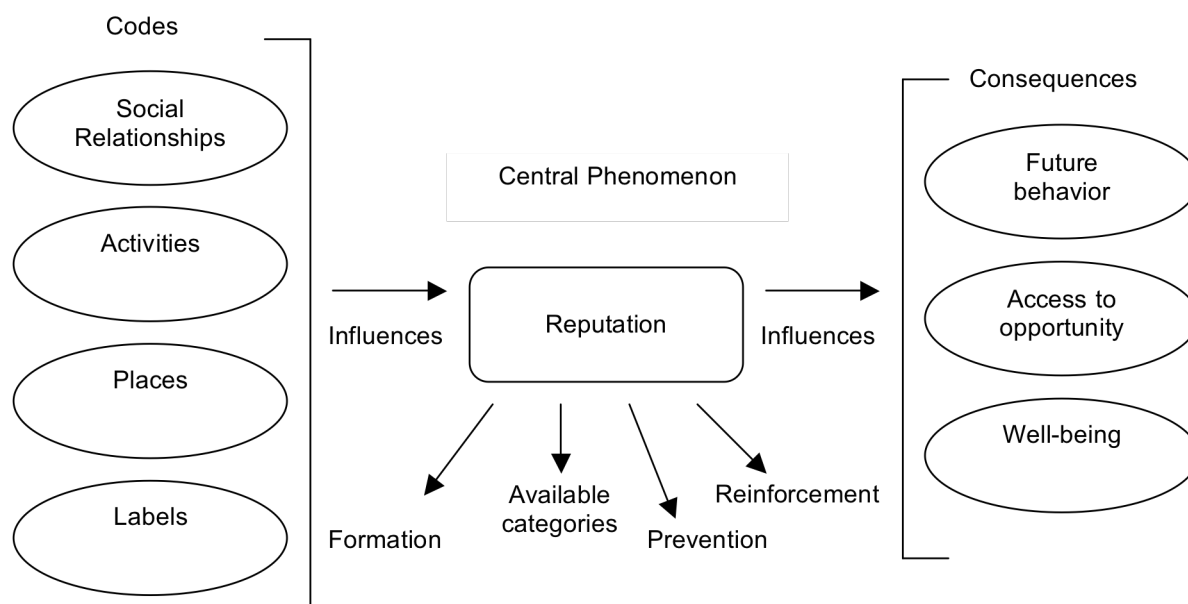
Memos and diagrams. Once data were collected memo writing continued to be a useful tool to help me think analytically. I wrote to capture connections or relationships between codes and categories and to keep track of "illuminating instances" which, according to Holliday (2002), are bits of interactions or behaviors that when examined in isolation do not reveal anything but

when examined in relationship to meaningful concepts or statements can begin to illuminate how a social process takes place.

As part of my memo writing, I practiced creating visual displays that mapped connections between themes, categories, and meaningful concepts in the data. I relied primarily upon the shorthand practice of "clustering" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 86) because I found it generative and useful for exploring potential relationships amongst main categories and subcategories I had identified during coding. Clustering is a method used to create a freehand image of the piece an analyst wants to write before she writes it. It helped me chart a course through detailed memos written in later stages of analysis and proved useful in writing chapters of this dissertation because I could look back at clusters created throughout my process and see how my thinking about the data had changed over time.

I also utilized these concept maps as a tool to guide analytic conversations with a small group of fellow doctoral students, whom I met with bi-weekly from October 2009 through August 2010. The purpose of our meetings was to help each other think about data analysis. During several meetings I explained my emergent analysis, answered questions, received feedback, and talked through next steps.

Phase three: Member checks. According to Glaser (1992), a good grounded theory should always make sense to the research participants. In order to test the conclusions I drew from the data and verify the accuracy of my interpretations I asked youth researchers and adult members of the BRC community to participate in member checks. Maxwell (2005) describes member checks as, "the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (p. 111).

Between April and August 2010 I asked both youth and adult members of the BRC community to share their perspectives about my analysis. I communicated regularly with three staff members of CYS during the analysis stage. I contacted them to help me make sense of data I found puzzling and to hear their ideas about incidents that occurred during the YPAR project. In July, I met with three youth researchers to test the validity of my emerging claims and to ask if the story being told about being a teenager in BRC matched their experience. I also met with the entire staff of CYS during their staff retreat. I shared data, presented findings and discussed implications of the study. CYS members shared their reactions and brainstormed ways to incorporate the information into future programs. Ana later informed me that the presentation at the retreat "set the stage" for their strategic planning session as part of their five-year plan. Finally, I met with Ana and Matt to talk about the impact our partnership has had on the organization and on future programming.

Validity

In the past 15 years, participatory action research has received increasing support from the academic community. There are, however, some scholars who resist it as a legitimate form of inquiry (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Creswell, 2005). These debates have raised important questions about validity criteria for action research projects, with some scholars suggesting that action research should not be evaluated using the same criteria applied to other forms of qualitative research (Fine, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2005). In this section, I discuss two validity issues relevant to my study and describe strategies I employed to manage potential threats. The first issue, researcher bias and objectivity, is grounded in the traditional validity criteria applicable to most qualitative designs. The second issue, democratic or expert validity, is an example of new criteria advocated by action research scholars.

Researcher Bias and Objectivity

Addressing researcher bias and objectivity is essential when conducting qualitative

research (Maxwell, 2005). In participatory action studies researcher biases are seen as

acceptable as long as they are surfaced, acknowledged, and critically examined. To this end, I

mitigated my own biases by checking in regularly with critical friends and by reflective

journaling. At the start of the project, I had planned to meet with critical friends who resided in

BRC. But as the project got underway, and I heard participants talk about issues related to

privacy and confidentiality, I chose not to discuss details of what I was learning with residents of

BRC. Instead, I shared my emergent analysis and reflections about the study with a small group

of doctoral students located in Boulder.

In YPAR, bias is viewed as a resource for inquiry because it is an opportunity for youth

to provide insights about issues and phenomena, which may not be available to adult researchers

(Kirshner et al., under review) Youth biases are productive, however, only when participants

learn how to mange them and intentionally practice this skill. In the summer research institute,

youth participated in a variety of reflective activities designed to help them surface and examine

their biases. For example, youth were introduced to the Ladder of Inference, which is a model

designed to assist individuals to become aware of how they think, interpret, and draw

conclusions from information (Argyris, 1993). During analysis, youth employed this model to

help identify how their own experiences, assumptions, and prior beliefs influenced their

interpretations of data. The use of the model facilitated a systematic approach to thinking about

data and helped youth remain open to new interpretations. In addition, all aspects of the project

from designing research questions to presenting results were deliberative, which created

opportunities for youth to challenge one another's thinking and generated new ideas.

According to Fine (2008), objectivity is achieved when researchers gather ample evidence from many distinct vantage points. To achieve strong objectivity in this study, I employed a variety of data collection methods, gathered information from multiple sources, and triangulated the data. Triangulation helped me to understand themes and patterns present in my data from more than one standpoint, which led to a more detailed and complex account of how reputations were formed and experienced by youth in BRC (Maxwell, 2005; Creswell, 2005). The findings that are presented in later chapters represent themes triangulated form three different types of participants: youth with "good" reputations, youth with "bad" reputations, and adults. In addition, during data collection and analysis I looked for discrepant evidence and variation within the topics and issues that were explored. For example, during interviews and focus groups, when participants talked about how difficult it was to change their reputation from "bad" to "good" in BRC, I made it a point to ask if they knew of anyone who had succeeded at repairing their reputation. Finally, I checked with youth and adult participants (described earlier) about the accuracy of my interpretations.

Democratic or Expert Validity

Participatory action research scholars discuss two related and overlapping terms to determine how well a participatory study is done with and not for participants. Democratic validity "refers to the extent to which the research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 56). Expert validity refers to how well research teams are able to develop and honor multiple forms of expertise within a research team, and challenge notions about which members of the collaboration are expert and about what (Fine, 2008).

Navigating these aspects of the project was a challenge because I had two research partners: CYS (the organization) and the YPAR team, which had differing levels of power and

influence in the project and in the community. The leaders of CYS were supportive and invested in the project but there were times when youth's ideas conflicted with adult leadership or challenged their stakeholders, which created tension for everyone involved. One example of a tension between CYS leadership and the youth occurred when youth were designing a t-shirt for the research team, which would be paid for with CYS money. In the design, the youth had included a quote that had emerged during the data collection phase (which held special meaning to them), but adults at CYS rejected the design because it included the word "bitch." Youth tried to negotiate by substituting symbols for the offensive word (e.g. B@$&!) and by removing any reference to CYS but were unsuccessful. Youth interest in designing the t-shirt waned after they were told they had to remove the quote.

An example of a situation in which youth challenged CYS stakeholders occurred during a YPAR presentation to a group of adult community members at the end of the summer. During the presentation, youth delivered their findings and recommendations, and asked if there were any questions. An audience member responded by saying, "I think you paint a horrid picture of our community and it is inaccurate because there are lots of things for kids to do here in the summer." He went on to say that he thought their analysis was flawed because it was "biased" and "unfair." The exchange was awkward and emotionally charged for the respondent, the youth, and adults in the room who supported the project. The youth responded with an explanation of their analysis and a description of how they arrived at their conclusions. I also attempted to address his concerns and to clarify the purpose of the research. Later that evening, YPAR members described the meeting as an example of how youth were disrespected and disregarded by adults in the community. The next day, CYS leadership fielded phone calls from community members who were upset or displeased with the results of the study and had to answer questions about their support of the project. Adults who objected to the comments of the audience member

also contacted CYS because they wanted to take action to ensure youth were heard and treated respectfully at future presentations.

The primary strategy I used to manage these unforeseen moments of tension was to be transparent about my thoughts and interests about each situation and to create space in regularly scheduled debriefs and reflective activities for youth and adult partners to do the same. It also helped that prior to starting this project Ana, Matt and I had talked specifically about roles and responsibilities. These examples demonstrate the kinds of interactions negotiated during this project that made it challenging to consistently meet the needs of all collaborators and stakeholders because their interests were varied and sometimes in conflict with one another. It was difficult to know if, how, or when to intervene and on whose behalf. As a result, I think the project achieved democratic validity with mixed results depending on the situation.

Practical Validity

I believe that a third type of validity addresses whether or not the project generated action or solutions related to the problem under investigation (Fine, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2005). At the onset of this study, I was concerned that once the summer research institute was complete, and I had returned to Boulder, the action component of the participatory action research would go unrealized because there was no one to champion or organize community efforts to address the issues that were identified in the YPAR project. To mitigate this threat, I concentrated on providing CYS with the support and resources to take on this challenge in a way they deemed appropriate for their community.

Since my departure in October 2009, I have maintained a relationship with Ana and the CYS staff. In the summer of 2010, I presented preliminary results of the study and recommendations at the beginning of the CYS strategic planning retreat. Staff incorporated this information into the planning of future programs and identification of future funding. Also in

2010, we participated in a study about community-based research, which explored the benefits and challenges of university-community partnerships. In preparation for talking with researchers we engaged in several conversations about how our project unfolded and lessons learned. It was during one of these conversations that I learned how my exit from BRC impacted CYS and the action steps created by youth. When I asked, what was one of the most challenging aspects of working with me on this project? Matt said,

> Your being in Boulder [after the summer] made it challenging. If you had been here long term we would have greater results with the long-term impact on the community. We had this cool, powerful summer project where we created momentum and interest. Then, when school started, I got swept back to having to focus on other things. Had you been here long term, even just once a month to meet with the team for conversations or continue action planning we could have sustained the momentum better.

As expected, my leaving impacted my community partner and created a loss of momentum and more work for CYS staff members who wanted to continue, even though they had other job responsibilities. Another challenge was finding funding to implement some of the ideas generated by youth. Despite the challenges, CYS believed the partnership was beneficial for myriad reasons. One of which was being represented in academic research and in the process of creating knowledge about rural places. Ana commented,

> I think with higher ed there is some stereotyping with rural communities you know, urban centers are cultural and intellectual centers and rural communities are "dumb bumpkins" so to speak, "the backwater." And I think for our community, it was so nice to be thought of as participants in this process, as people who have voice, as people whose voice, and opinion, and experience, mattered and was valid. For a university to actually come into the community, as opposed to anytime the community wants anything we have got to go

to the front-range… So from the community, I kept hearing, it is so nice to actually have someone here and have our opinion treated as valid, like it matters.

These conversations led to our planning to co-author an article about how to create productive partnerships between universities and rural communities.

To their credit, in the year and a half since the YPAR team delivered their results, CYS has started to involve youth in decision making and planning within the organization and has made changes to several youth programs. For example, they now have a youth council. This group meets monthly to brainstorm ideas to engage youth, plan events, and to strategize with adult facilitators about a variety of issues experienced while delivering FWI programs. Another change that was implemented is the way in which the mentoring program recruits young people. Instead of only targeting at risk youth, the CYS mentor program now provides mentors for all youth in the community who are interested in receiving adult support. In addition, the staff has started to network with adults in other community organizations to carve out additional spaces for youth voice and participation. This started when a staff member informally approached a local newspaper editor about the possibility of incorporating youth voice into the publication. She said the editor was open to the idea and quoted him as saying, "Definitely, kids are part of this community and this is their newspaper too." When she talked to some of the youth from CYS programs about writing for the paper she said the youth were "really excited about it, because everybody reads the local paper." The first items published in the newspaper were a collection of poems written by students at the alternative school.

CHAPTER V

PLACE MATTERS: GROWING UP IN "DREAMTOWN"

"Experience Colorado!" insists the highway sign as I complete the three-hour commute from the crowded metropolis of Denver and arrive in the rural mountain community of Blue River County (BRC). Flanked by majestic peaks and densely forested wilderness, BRC boasts 300 days of sunshine, clean air, and unspoiled landscapes rich with wildlife and resources.

It is springtime in the Rocky Mountains and the drive down the winding highway offers stunning views of some of the range's most impressive peaks often referred to as "fourteeners" because they rise more than 14,000 feet in elevation. I admire the snow-capped summits and then I notice the land—wide expanses in every direction unfettered by buildings or pavement. As the road descends into the valley I am greeted by pastoral images: handsome horses grazing in green pastures, men riding tractors, and red barns nestled amid poplar and cottonwood trees. And then, there is the river.

BRC is home to a mighty river. Fueled by snowmelt in the high country, water travels down countless creeks and streams into Blue River, which drops quickly in elevation churning up legendary, "wicked" whitewater. When it widens and slows the river offers some of the best trout fishing in the state and ideal spots for swimming. Like most who are lucky enough to visit this place, I am enamored with the river. I have spent countless hours watching it, trying to understand how currents, rocks, and gradients form its features. I have spent more time than I care to admit imagining what might happen if I were to find myself tumbling through the rapids instead of sitting safely in a kayak. Finally, I appreciate the river for being one of the most historically and economically important rivers in a part of the country where water rights are hotly contested. The river has played an enduring role in the development of this region and has been described by local authors as "emerging from an under appreciated polluted resource" to

become the focal point representing the spirit of this community.

As I head down valley, roadside displays highlight the rich natural and human history of the area by pointing out geological features, marking sites where artifacts can be found, and recounting tales of the native people, explorers, miners, and trappers who once inhabited the area. Markers also call attention to unimproved dirt roads and trails that lead to the abandoned mines, ghost towns, and thermal springs found throughout the region. As I drive, I make a mental note of the ones I would like to visit on my bike. I turn off the main road, drive past Bailey's ranch and feed store, and head toward the city of Mariposa.

Originally constructed as a railroad town in the late 1800's, Mariposa has one of the largest historical downtown districts in Colorado with buildings that have been carefully restored to preserve the Victorian architecture. The rest of town is a hodgepodge of buildings and architectural styles. A few blocks from the commercial downtown area, I pull up to a pink bungalow, circa 1900, and meet my new landlord Frank who is waiting in his pristine 1964 Chevy pickup. Frank raised three children in this house and while he and his wife no longer live here (they moved three blocks away into a house he built himself), he has been reluctant to sell it because he is holding out hope that someday one of his grandchildren will want to live here.

The four-room 750-square foot house is unremarkable to me but is obviously very well maintained. It has kitchen appliances from the 1960's, which are immaculate and in working order, new carpet, fresh paint, and a back yard lined with cords of well-seasoned firewood. Until I came along, the house sat empty for almost three years. Frank explained to me that he had stopped renting it because "people just don't take care of things the way they used to."

I learned about the house from my friend Morgan who walks past it each morning on her way to drop off her four-year old at the pre-school across the street. In April, when I was looking for a place to stay, Morgan remembered seeing a tiny "For Rent" sign in the front window, so

she inquired on my behalf. At first, Frank was hesitant to rent it to me but after he recognized Morgan and her daughter "from around town" he seemed to warm up to the idea and became curious about my extended visit.

I journeyed to BRC to try to understand how growing up rural shapes developmental pathways for youth. I spent six months living in Mariposa and six months commuting back and forth from Boulder. I chose BRC because it is a rural area in the western United States where, unlike many of its rural counterparts, the population is growing. Since 1990 the area has seen a trend of in-migration, resulting in a population increase of almost 30%. Of this total, 38% migrated from other parts of Colorado, while the balance came from Texas, California and Illinois.

To help me understand the lives and experiences of rural youth who are most at risk of becoming disconnected I partnered with a community-based organization in BRC to develop this study and collaborated with nine youth co-researchers. Working with youth provided an opportunity to gain insider knowledge about growing up rural and helped me identify aspects of academic and community life that affected youth engagement and that mattered most to youth. This remainder of this chapter highlights youth perspectives about what it is like to be a teenager in BRC and how features of this rural place influenced the construction of youths' social identities.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the ways that place mattered for youth growing up in BRC. I describe BRC and specific characteristics of the physical environment, which I will argue play an important role in the development of youths' social identities. Consistent with Proshansky et al. (1983) who explain, "there is no physical environment that is also not a social environment and vice-versa" (p. 64), I found that the physical features of this place are interwoven into the social and cultural worlds of the people who reside here. First, I

provide a brief history of BRC, showing the relationship between the physical world and the current identity of this place. Next, I describe several dilemmas experienced by the community and introduce two tensions experienced by youth participants. The first tension is related to the identity of BRC, while physical features of this place inform the second.

<div align="center">**Identity of Place**</div>

Historical BRC

According to written history, ancestors of the Ute Nation inhabited the area for centuries prior to the mid 1800's when the United States took control of Colorado in the Mexican-American War[4]. Soon after, White settlers and prospectors arrived in droves looking to acquire land promised by the Homestead Act of 1862 and hoping to strike it rich by discovering silver and gold. As people migrated west, the region where BRC is located quickly became known for varied and abundant natural resources; industry boomed.

Railroads and mines were built to support the extraction and transport of precious metals and fossil fuels. Mills and irrigation systems were established to support growing agricultural pursuits including farming, ranching and forestry. Over the course of the next 100 years or so, BRC enjoyed steady growth and prosperity. Businesses moved in, and visitors arrived seeking adventure in the Wild West. People who settled in the area built schools, a hospital, churches, hotels, and a popular retail trade area.

In the 1980's, however, BRC experienced a massive economic downturn. Spurred by a national recession, the area's largest mine ceased operation and laid-off nearly 3000 workers, one-third of whom resided in BRC. As a result, the railroad decreased its service, businesses closed their doors and regional unemployment rates climbed as high as 30%. The closure of the

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[4] Sources for demographic and historical data come from books, reports, web sites, and newspapers; they are kept confidential to protect the anonymity of the county and the research participants.

mine led to the rapid destruction of the local economy and a mass exodus from the area.

The mining industry in the area did not fully recover but BRC restored itself and has undergone what local historians describe as "an economic makeover of epic proportions." While natural resources still play an essential role in the economic health of the region, the local economy and the lifestyles of its residents are fundamentally different now than they were in the 1980's. While BRC used to be home to laborers who produced materials that fueled the national economy, its present day incarnation is grounded in leisure travel and recreation, which are industries largely dependent upon the national economy. This has led to a new identity for this place. Local authors depict the changes that have occurred in the past thirty years in the following passage,

It's a change from cowboy boots and steel-toed boots to neoprene booties and clipless pedals; from cotton-canvas jeans to canvas on easels; from miners' hard hats to cycling and river helmets; from oil and mud-covered overalls to quick drying nylon and sweat-stained polyester tights; from picks and shovels to plastic paddles and bamboo fly rods.

In the next section I describe the demographic and economic changes that have taken place in BRC during the last thirty years.

A New Identity for BRC

Today BRC is highly publicized as a place where people live healthy lifestyles in a peaceful but stimulating environment hidden away from the stresses and problems of urban areas—a rural idyll for the 21st century. Experts refer to this place as an amenity-rich rural area. Amenity-rich rural places have an abundance of desirable natural features including favorable climates, attractive scenery and plenty of recreational opportunities. Inhabitants of rural idylls enjoy the best of small town living yet remain relatively close to more populated areas (within several hours) that offer work, entertainment, and cultural activities.

BRC enjoys less traffic then mountain communities located in proximity to major interstate highways. This remoteness in conjunction with the natural splendor and abundant resources of the area have landed BRC on several top ten lists such as "America's dream towns," "best places you have never heard of" and "top adventure hideouts." Popular travel magazines celebrate BRC as a "mecca" for outdoor enthusiasts as it is home to some of the state's most exciting recreation opportunities including epic trails, amazing whitewater, and awe-inspiring climbs.

While the physical environment receives top billing in BRC, the county has also gained recognition as a regional hub for arts and cultural activities. After the mine closed in 1980, residents left in search of employment and economic opportunities leaving an excess of inexpensive real estate available to potential buyers and renters. Artists moved in to take advantage of the low prices. Jewelers, blacksmiths, woodcutters, photographers, potters, painters and sculptors turned vacant buildings into studio spaces and empty storefronts into galleries. Over time, the production of art and the commerce it produced led to the formation of several art-focused organizations, which established regular workshops, classes, and exhibits that have benefited residents as well as attracted visitors from around the state. As tourism grew, business owners started to promote annual events and festivals that featured a variety of local musicians, restaurateurs, and vendors. Increased numbers of visitors heightened residents' pride in their community and spurred interest in collecting artifacts from the past, preserving historical buildings, and raising awareness about the area's cultural heritage.

After the mine closure essentially wiped out the real estate market, artists were not the only ones to take advantage of low real estate prices. Affluent professionals purchased second homes and youthful retirees moved in to spend their golden years enjoying the area's natural amenities and a multitude of outdoor activities. Since then, the combination of recreation and cultural

activities, inexpensive housing, mild climate, and proximity to metropolitan areas have earned

BRC the title of one of ten best "bargain retirement spots" in the U.S.—a place three out of five

baby boomers would like to live. As a result, 45% of the BRC population is over the age of 45 as

compared to 32% in all of Colorado.

Dilemmas in Dreamtown

Natural beauty, opportunities for outdoor adventures and a thriving arts culture have made

BRC a popular destination for living, recreating, and retiring. But its' changing economy, rapid

growth and increasing popularity has produced tensions for many members of the community. In

this section I describe several aspects of BRC that have become problematic for residents.

Jobs are not easy to find in BRC. I often heard residents say they love the community but it

can be a hard place to make a living. The largest employers in the county are the state

correctional facility, which employs approximately 400 people, a small ski area with 342

employees[5], Wal-Mart with 250 positions, and a regional medical center that employs 250. Other

employment options include working in the public schools, local government, and service

industry jobs such as employment in motels, restaurants, small shops, and outdoor recreation.

There are also a number of small and locally owned businesses.

While tourism provides seasonal employment, positions in hospitality or outdoor industries

offer only part-time income and most do not offer medical insurance, affordable housing or

retirement benefits. In addition, the majority of these positions tend to be low paying and provide

few opportunities for training or advancement. One exception is being employed as a guide for

activities in the outdoor industry such as a raft guide, horse wrangler, or ski instructor, all which

require specialized skills in order to ensure the safety of clients. Residents explain that many of

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[5] This is an important distinction. Small ski areas are considerably different than the "world class" ski destinations located throughout this region of Colorado. For example, one nearby world-class resort has 3500 year round positions and approximately 11,600 seasonal employees.

these jobs go to "outsiders" who are not originally from BRC and who may only live in the county part-time.

Another tension related to BRC's new identity is connected to changes in the real estate market. During the local depression caused by the mine closure, small one and two bedroom homes sold for under $20,000. But as retirees, second home owners, and young families moved in to purchase these homes, the number of available properties was reduced, which, combined with the increasing popularity of BRC, increased the price of homes in the area. By the late 1990's home values had increased by over 40% and have continued to climb. Today, the housing market consists of older homes plus a number of newly built subdivisions and private homes. With an average home price of $270,000 and an average annual wage of less than $30,000, many residents cannot afford to own their home.

Low wages and expensive housing creates difficult financial situations for many residents because after paying a high rent or mortgage there is little money available to pay for day-to-day living expenses or life's unexpected events. One adult resident described it like this,

> Most of us, you know with the cost of living, the cost to buy a house, the cost to rent a trailer, whatever, you're always on the brink of financial disaster, literally your nose is just above the water line. If you hit a deer and wreck the car, I mean its just financial disaster.

Another resident wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper in response to an article that had promoted BRC as a mountain community with affordable housing. In the letter, the writer depicts a common financial situation experienced by full-time residents:

> Wait, $244,000 to live within 10 feet of your neighbor, when you live in the middle of nowhere. So you sit in your living room and watch people enter and leave from the brew pub across the street. It's just the big city in the middle of the high country

with big city prices. What's the mortgage payment on a low end $244,000 home? It's about $1500 a month and that's low end. What part of that is affordable? That's 10 bucks an hour, 40 hours per week just to cover your house payment, and then there are taxes, there's a car payment, insurance and gas and utilities, and food, and health care which a lot of us can't afford, and internet access and cell phone. My point is $1500 a month is not affordable with a good paying job in Blue River county. So, the only folks who can afford the "affordable housing" bring money with them. It's not for us who already live and work here.

Other examples of tensions salient in the community include land management issues and the question of who should pay for municipal improvements necessary to accommodate tourists. Expanded land use has surfaced issues about the preservation of wild places and natural resources, which has heightened conflicts amongst recreational users, private landowners, and land management agencies. Increased tourism has led to the renovation of streets to improve traffic flow and provide adequate parking for visitors. This caused lively debates among homeowners about who should have to pay for these improvements. Homeowners argued that since business owners would reap the majority of the benefits, then business owners should pay for the improvements. In addition, recent countywide assessments have also identified the following trends as problematic: limited public transportation, lack of affordable child-care; and limited access to dental and mental health services. Some dilemmas, such as a lack of affordable housing and limited access to dental care impact residents of all ages, but some tensions were especially challenging for adolescents. In the next section, I highlight two tensions shared by youth across the spectrum of engagement. As detailed in my validity section, although originally identified by the YPAR project, these tensions were corroborated by teenagers with "good" and "bad" reputations and by adult participants.

Tensions for Youth

In county reports and needs assessments, BRC officials acknowledged several issues that negatively affect youth in the community. These include a lack of programs for teens, limited public transportation and employment options, substance abuse, and school facilities that are in disrepair. According to rural scholars these are issues commonly experienced by rural communities across the nation (Perkins, 2002). Although all of these issues were reflected in my data, I focus here on two tensions experienced universally by youth in BRC related to characteristics of place. These tensions were not specifically mentioned in the official literature about BRC nor were they discussed as commonplace in the literature I reviewed about rural areas in the United States. The first tension is connected to the identity of BRC, whereas the second is related to how features of the physical environment influence social interactions. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss youth's experiences with these issues and explain how each affected the day-to-day lives of youth growing up here.

Tensions Across Generations

One example of a tension described by youth is the hostility or resentment they felt directed at them from many adults, and specifically from the most senior residents in the community. Some youth attributed it to a "generation gap" describing age related differences about values or about what constitutes acceptable music, dress, or behavior, while others said they felt stereotyped in a negative way just for being a teenager. Comments describing how adults see youth, such as "they think we are all bad trouble makers," and "they think we are all criminals" were consistent across data collected for this study. In addition, analyses of the YPAR

surveys found 58% of youth surveyed felt "singled out" for being a teenager in a public place, and 52% reported feeling "judged" by the community because of their age[6].

Youth felt judged and stereotyped because of their age. Analyses of all data sources revealed a shared perception amongst youth participants. The perception was that adults view teenagers as problematic members of the BRC community. Surprisingly, youth reported feeling stereotyped regardless of the kind of reputation they had as an individual. For example, analyses of survey responses found youth who saw themselves as having a positive reputation also reported feeling stigmatized for being a teenager. Table 6 provides a sample of responses to two survey questions that were cross-referenced to examine how youth, who self-identified as having a positive reputation, thought their community perceived teens, a social group in which they share membership.

Table 6

Distinctions between individual and collective identities.

Survey Number	Question #1: What reputation do you have and where does it affect you most?	Question #6: How do you think the community views teens in BRC? How does it affect you daily?
#3	A good one. Mainly at work and with friends.	Like **we** have no responsibility.
#8	I have a reputation for being diligent and hardworking. It has allowed me several good job opportunities	Many people see teens as punks. As a result, many do not give **us** a chance to prove ourselves.
#16	Good ones- wrestler and bull rider.	They think **we** are all bad troublemakers.
#30	Yes, nice guy.	They act like **we** do not know anything because **we** are kids and it sucks.

Other evidence to support this finding was grounded in data collected from focus groups. In this first excerpt, a group of youth who were positioned as community "leaders" (by

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[6] In Chapters 5-7 I have included frequencies from questions on the YPAR survey. See Appendix D for a table with frequencies included in these chapters.

themselves and by adults) with "good" reputations, discussed how they thought youth were

perceived in the community:

Interviewer:	So how do you think teens are perceived in this community, in general?
Youth 1:	The teens who are, who have parents and everything are viewed like regular people,
Youth 2:	It depends on who you are.
Youth 3:	But the senior citizens view us as heathens.
Youth 2:	I think it's kind of hard for like senior citizens to like, you know, view what life is like for teenagers nowadays.
Youth 4:	It's just the perception.
Interviewer:	What perception?
Youth 4:	Like teenagers you know they're bad kids, you know they're always getting into trouble.
Youth 3:	Yah.
Youth 2:	They're never up to any good. Anything, that's just how society sees kids.
Youth 3:	Yeah, it does.
Youth 1:	Especially in the retirement community.

In this second excerpt, a group of youth who self identified as having "bad" reputations,

described adults' perceptions of youth in almost an identical manner:

Interviewer:	How do you think teenagers are viewed by adults in BRC?
Youth 1:	We're all bad kids.
Youth 2:	By the looks,

Interviewer: We're all bad kids, is that what you said?

Youth 1:   Yah, it's true.

Youth 4:   Well this is kind of like an older people's community

Interviewer: Old like me?

Youth 1:   Older than you.

Youth 4:   Like my grandma's age.

These excerpts illustrate that regardless of a young person's individual status in the community, youth believed they were stigmatized because they are teenagers. In the first excerpt, youth participants connect the way teenagers are seen in their community to an image that is held about teens by "society" and in the second excerpt, youth attribute a negative image to BRC being a community for older people. Next, I detail how being positioned as a member of an undesirable social group shaped interactions with adults in public spaces and affected youth engagement in community life.

Interactions with adults. When asked to talk about their interactions with adults, all youth identified at least one adult who they interacted with in a productive manner and believed was a positive force in their lives. This is important because research has shown that one caring adult can help a young person thrive despite obstacles and challenges (Rutter, 1990; Benard, 2004; Werner & Smith, 1992). Teenagers described positive adults as enthusiastic about spending time with youth, "straight up" and honest, and committed to helping them through tough times. In a focus group, teenagers described how a teacher demonstrated his care and concern:

Interviewer: How do you know that this teacher cares? I mean, what does he do to
                show you?

Youth 1:   He tells us he loves us.

Youth 2:   Like if you decide to be dumb and ditch school, like we did one time, he

will call you and text you just to make sure you are OK.

Interviewer: You don't mind him doing that?

Youth 1:   No, we love it! It's totally cool if a teacher actually cares enough,

Youth 2:   If you're not doing good he's like, alright we're going to work it out,

we're going to make sure that you get what you need. You know, like

you're messing up, but he's like alright well we're going to work on it.

Youth 3:   Oh yeah, and he sits there and listens. I mean he'll talk to you but he

really listens too.

Youth talked about the importance of adults who engaged them in conversations about their

dreams and aspirations. In his interview, Caleb emphasized that his parents inspire him to think

about his future, "I really like to do things with my parents because I love my parents. They're

the coolest ever. They never tell me something can't be done. They are always being creative."

Youth appreciated adults who extended personal invitations to join classes and activities or

encouraged them to reconsider their choice to leave or drop out of programs in which they were

once participants. Finally, teenagers' valued adults who inquired about the accuracy of

information they had received about individual youth, instead of "just believing everything they

heard." But youth drew a sharp distinction between interactions with adults one-on-one, or on a

personal level, versus interactions that occurred in the public spaces within the community.

Youth participants characterized their interactions with adult residents in public spaces as

negative. When asked to explain what negative interactions looked like youth explained, "they

treat us like disrespectful trash," "they talk to you like you are a child," and "they treat you like

you're too young to know anything." Youth described being "watched," "chased," "followed,"

"not trusted" and, in some cases, "harassed" in a variety of situations and spaces within their

community. One common experience talked about by youth was feeling surveilled in stores and restaurants. Caleb's story illustrates a scenario I heard often from youth participants:

Interviewer: I'm just wondering, where are the places that you feel welcome to hang

out?

Caleb: The only places we really hang out anymore is the skate park, North Park

and Riverside. They're the only places we can go, I guess, and be

ourselves.

Interviewer: Okay.

Caleb: Like honestly anywhere else, people will make us leave.

Interviewer: Who is people?

Caleb: Like the cops or owners.

Interviewer: The owners of the businesses?

Caleb: Yah like I told you about [name of a grocery store]. It's ridiculous. I

cannot be in there for more than 5 minutes or else I get kicked out, and

I'm not doing anything. Like it is straight up legit. Like it's so dumb.

Like I do not do anything. Like it's ridiculous.

Interviewer: So you you'll just be standing there?

Caleb: Well no,

Interviewer: What do you do?

Caleb: As soon as like I stop in one place for more than like 3 seconds, [laughing

incredulous] You know like all of, like yah. I don't know.

Interviewer: Why do you think they are acting that way?

Caleb: It's the new staff, that one lady.

Interviewer: Okay,

Caleb: But like it was always good. Like we were always fine and sitting at Starbucks you know for like a half hour or hour, you know talking quietly you know or whatever. And then, after like 5 minutes you're out. And like I told you about the chips thing. Me and Name, just me and him talking quietly, like literally, at like this voice level or a little louder. I told you we were trying to decide what chips [to buy]. We were literally talking about chips and she walks up and says, "You can't loiter here. This is a place to buy stuff." I'm like, we're looking at chips. We're going to buy chips. She's like, "No you need to leave right now." I'm like, can I at least buy this? "No, leave."

Interviewer: Now why do you think she did that?

Caleb: She doesn't like, you know, I don't know.

Interviewer: She doesn't like what?

Caleb: Teenagers.

Caleb's narrative demonstrated he felt treated unfairly and conveyed why he thought this interaction occurred—because he was a teenager. Stories such as Caleb's were told by a variety of youth who occupied different places on the spectrum of engagement and by youth who saw themselves as having both positive and negative reputations.

During a focus group with youth who had "good" reputations, one youth attributed increased surveillance of teens to adults "losing patience" with teenage residents due to increased youth presence in specific locations around towns, and incidents such as burglary and vandalism in the community, some committed by teenagers but many which did not involve youth. Adults concurred, saying they too believed residents and business owners had become frustrated with the youth presence in the towns of Mariposa or Cielos Claros because "it hurts business" or

because adults simply do not enjoy having teenagers around. Consider these excerpts from interviews with adults:

> The city fathers are concerned about tourism and they see children as a deterrent to people coming in and feeling comfortable.

> I don't necessarily think adults really like teenagers all the time. I mean, I think they, it's kind of like, I don't want to walk by that group of teenagers or, oh you know they're up to no good. I definitely think that when community members see a group of teenagers hanging out together it's always "they're up to trouble," you know, I think that a lot of adults think teenagers are just annoying.

Adults described other ways teens were treated in unfair and disparaging ways in public spaces, which included being followed or ticketed for infractions such as riding skateboards on the sidewalk or riding bicycles with no hands. Local newspapers contained a series of letters to the editor about an incident in which local kids were reprimanded for what many viewed as a minor infraction:

> Over spring break my 10-year-old son and his 9-year-old friend decided to amuse themselves in a constructive manner by going out with their wagon to sell homemade birdhouses and make a few dollars to buy themselves something special. As a parent I see this sort of activity as great lesson in self-confidence, human relations, math, etc. This is the sort of thing many of us did and learned from as kids. Most people would probably agree this to be a much better activity for a couple of young boys than sitting home playing video games, vandalizing things at the park or, worse yet, skateboarding on the sidewalks. Sadly, the lesson these kids received from the code enforcer this day was that their innocent and well-meaning ambitions made them law breakers. She stopped them

and informed them that they needed to purchase a business license (for around $250 I

have heard) and that she could write them tickets if they didn't stop.

While this incident involved youth a few years younger than those who participated in this study,

it exemplifies the experience of young people being punished for seemingly harmless behavior.

On its own, this example could be viewed as the result of an over zealous code enforcer but

combined with other messages youth reported receiving from adults in their community, the

situation could also be viewed as part of a pattern of targeting youth.

Most adults I spoke to acknowledged why teens in their community might feel under

suspicion. According to adult participants, it was a common perception that places where youth

convene are the places where "bad stuff always seems to happen" and while this was true some

of the time, youth were often assumed to participate in crimes even when there was no evidence

of youth involvement. One adult said,

I feel like youth were getting blamed for some things going on in the community and

probably unfairly I would say. I think youth can definitely be a scapegoat for things that

go on here.

Figure 5 shows a column that appeared in a local newspaper targeting youth for a crime that had

not yet been committed. In this column the author blamed youth for graffiti that had yet to occur

in an area frequented by outdoor enthusiasts, and threatened a violent retaliation if the area were

to be vandalized in the future. In interviews, when I asked adults what they thought about the

column, I heard several comments such as "teenagers don't read the newspapers" but most found

it problematic and were concerned about it reinforcing a negative perception of youth and

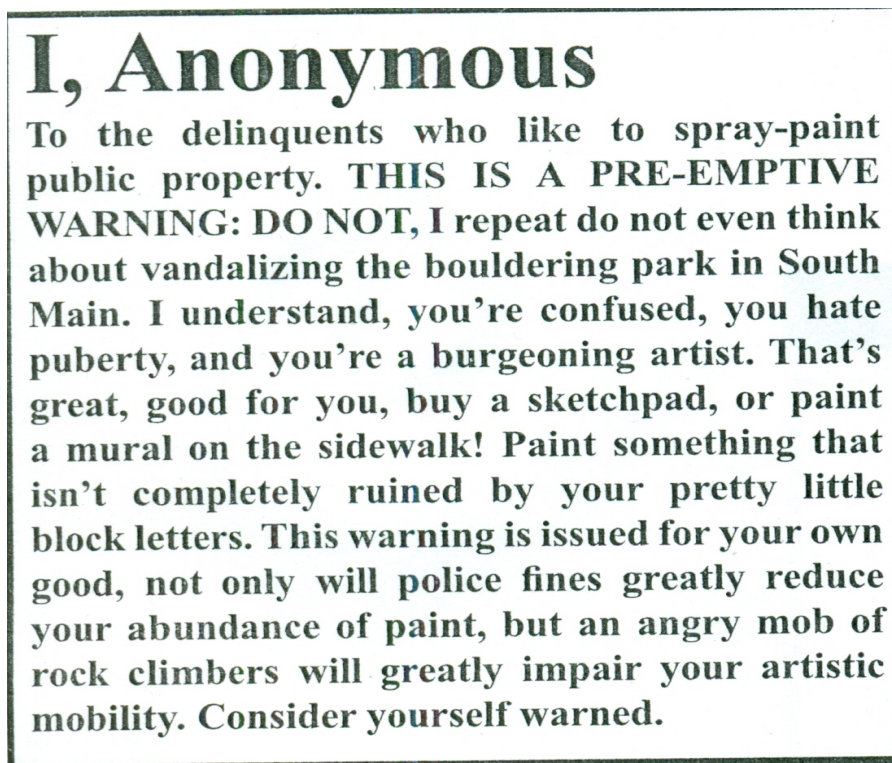creating an atmosphere in which youth feel unwelcome.

I, Anonymous

To the delinquents who like to spray-paint public property. **THIS IS A PRE-EMPTIVE WARNING: DO NOT, I** repeat do not even think about vandalizing the bouldering park in South Main. I understand, you're confused, you hate puberty, and you're a burgeoning artist. That's great, good for you, buy a sketchpad, or paint a mural on the sidewalk! Paint something that isn't completely ruined by your pretty little block letters. This warning is issued for your own good, not only will police fines greatly reduce your abundance of paint, but an angry mob of rock climbers will greatly impair your artistic mobility. **Consider yourself warned.**

Figure 5. BRC newspaper column 8/4/09

When I showed the column to youth participants, they responded with anger and objected to being held accountable for the actions of others, instead they argued, "We should be treated like individuals." A conversation amongst youth researchers during the YPAR project conveyed youth experiences with being judged based upon the actions of their peers. Two youth told a story about how last year several commercial properties in the northern part of the county were broken into and robbed. Sarah explained, "Teens did it and got caught. But then the business owners were kind of iffy, you know? I understand, but I didn't steal." Sarah said, after that incident she felt "watched" and treated "suspiciously" by adults. Tony said he felt "blamed" because business owners would chase him and his friends away from the front of businesses in the downtown area.

On several occasions, adults compared the treatment of youth in their community to racial profiling. Here one adult made the comparison:

> We could be sittin' down by the river down by North street and we could be
>
> passing a joint around and there could be a group of kids thirty yards from us with
>
> a skateboard and the police would go to them. Yep. I think it's that stereotype, it's
>
> the same thing if you're black, you're going to get picked on first. So if you're young,
>
> you're going to get picked on first.

Many adults expressed feeling troubled by the overall perception of teens in the community; these adults conveyed their motivation to advocate for youth and challenge discriminating remarks or practices. Others, however, viewed it as an inescapable reality or condition of being a teenager.

Places and spaces for youth. Negative interactions between youth and adults in BRC created an environment in which youth felt ostracized and unwelcome in public and commercial spaces; particularly the ones located in the historical downtown areas. As a result, groups of youth occupied only a few public areas in the community.

I first noticed an absence of teenagers in town when I relocated to BRC in the spring. I made note of this observation in one of the audio dictations recorded while driving to and from BRC:

> Where are the youth? I have been here for three days and I have yet to see youth
>
> convening in a public place without parents or accompanied by an adult. Sure, I see them
>
> at school or at CYS programs but in town I have only seen a few working as bus boys or
>
> behind the counters making coffee.

Looking back, I remember thinking that spring and summer would be a perfect time to be in BRC because that is when this place comes alive with activity. Since social activities often take place outside here I thought it would be easy to observe youth, for example near the river and in the town centers. But my extended stay in this place proved that finding groups of youth (3 or

more) was more challenging than I had anticipated. This was quite a contrast to living in Boulder where I cross paths with groups of teenagers in public spaces on a regular basis: on the bus, at movie theatres, at community social events, and in parks, shopping malls, restaurants and cafes. In BRC, however, I quickly learned that if I wanted to find groups of youth in public areas I had to go to parks and other outdoor spaces, mostly at night when adults were not present, or frequent the few commercial places youth described as youth friendly. Youth friendly spaces were described by youth as places they felt comfortable, respected and free from adult scrutiny. Or as one youth remarked, "places where there are no adults." Youth participants identified two youth friendly businesses in the northern part of the county and two in the southern. Both of these businesses were local eateries, which offered inexpensive take out food such as burgers, pizza, and milkshakes.

During the time data were collected for this dissertation, I heard youth and adults articulate that there were few places designed intentionally to meet the needs and desires of teenagers in BRC; most people I talked to perceived this as problematic. Harry, an adult participant conveyed a popular sentiment found across all data sources:

> We don't have a recreation center, we don't have a community center that is open to the kids, we don't have an arcade or a movie theatre, we don't have any happening or exciting activities or youth groups happening three or four days a week where youth can be part of the community, part of an activity, or be exposed to new and exciting activities. The kids are always bored because there is nothing to do.

In a focus group, two youth told me the lack of facilities for youth drove them to regularly "break into" the high school gym to play basketball at night, which continued until they were caught and a security guard was alerted to the situation.

While there was a movie theatre located in the southern end of the county that featured one to two films (two to three times per day, a couple of days per week), youth described the kinds of movies played there as usually being of little interest to them because they are often "family" or "Disney-type" movies meant for "old people" or "little kids." Several years ago, there had been an arcade that "catered" to teenagers providing a safe indoor space for teens to be entertained while they socialized. Inexpensive food and beverages were available and there was minimal adult supervision. Unfortunately, it went out of business.

Just prior to my arrival a new venue, The Spot, opened its doors in the southern part of the county. Advertised as a "youth only" space, it was located in an area adjacent to a church and open Friday evenings until midnight. It provided a space to "hang out," video games, music, and a limited café menu. Occasionally, The Spot sponsored live music played by local youth bands. The youth I spoke to gave it mixed reviews. While they appreciated having a space to meet friends and hangout, several youth remarked they did not appreciate that adults "controlled" certain aspects of the venue. For example, adult leadership disallowed the playing of a video game because it contained too much offensive language, sex, and violence.

I was able to find groups of youth in sponsored activities (football games or CYS activity days) or during community festivals and summer celebrations. Youth researchers frequently talked favorably about these events and seemed to look forward to participating. When asked why they enjoyed these activities many said they were exciting because they "could meet new people" because there were many out-of-town visitors or described fun music, games, and activities. I also heard comments such as "adults are mellower" or are "not as uptight" during these events. When asked if they felt scrutinized during these times, youth explained that police and business owners appeared less concerned with youth activity because there were "so many adults doing bad things."

In-between spaces. After a couple of months in BRC, I noticed that I could locate groups of young people in what I came to think of as in-between spaces. These spaces were not destinations but, instead, were on the way to or near destination locations; places such as behind their cars in parking lots, across the street from the high school in an empty lot, walking the streets at night, or on the periphery of sponsored activities, for example, just outside the field lights at the football games. These spaces afforded youth an opportunity to be in the public realm but out of the direct supervision of adults.

"There's nothing to do here." As a place dominated by recreation, BRC is positioned as having plenty of things to do. An advertisement in a widely distributed travel brochure reads, "Whether seeking an extreme outdoor adventure, a visit through a historic ghost town, a fun family vacation, or a mountain getaway, BRC offers an enticing menu of year round activities for visitors ranging in age, interests and ability." Yet data collected for this dissertation suggested an alternate experience for youth. Surveys conducted by the YPAR team revealed 65% of youth participants reported feeling "bored" because "there's nothing to do" in BRC; comments such as "there are no activities for youth" were common throughout the data. While some have found that boredom is a common experience for most teenagers (Larson, 2000), closer inspection of this issue revealed many youth did not have access to many of the activities prized by the community, such as outdoor recreational activities and participation in the arts culture, which resulted in some youth feeling like outsiders in their own community. The one exception was that many youth were involved in athletic teams (e.g. football, basketball, and volleyball). As Lucy, an adult explained,

Some kids are shut out off the activities that define this place. Everyone wants to

go play, and then sit around and talk about the big water at the end of the day. But

these kids, they do not have access so it's like they are not even members of the

community.

Adults often acknowledged that many youth did not partake in the BRC lifestyle, and some of

their explanations seemed to suggest youth were uninterested or unaware of the area's amenities.

Josef an adult community member explained,

Its kind of crazy to me, but these youth have lived here all their lives and they don't really

see everything around them. A lot of them have never climbed a mountain, never gone

mountain biking, never rafted the river, never skied. They have never gotten engaged in

what this place has to offer.

But youth, however, consistently identified "natural beauty," "amazing scenery," and the

mountains as some of the best parts about growing up in BRC indicating an awareness of their

surroundings. When asked to explain their boredom especially in light of the fact that BRC is

well known for having so much to do, most youth described opportunities available in BRC as

not intended for their consumption. Instead, they said these activities were designed for others;

especially wealthy, older members of the community, and tourists:

Interviewer: What do you mean there is nothing to do?

Youth: It's considered a retirement town, so there's nothing for teenagers or the

kids to do in this town other than go to the skate park or just walk around

town.

Interviewer: How would you describe where you live to someone who has never

been here?

Brit: It's kind of like a tourist town, tourists and retirement.

When youth were asked specifically why they did not participate in the multitude of outdoor

recreational activities available in BRC, youth identified several barriers including a lack of transportation, skills, and knowledge. They also explained they could not afford to pay for admission or instruction, nor could they purchase expensive equipment:

Interviewer: Do you ever do any of that stuff up in the mountains?

Brit: Sometimes I go hiking but not as much as I probably should. It's just, I can't really do that actually. Rafting, you know it costs lots of money. Fishing costs money, you gotta get your license. And off-roading, I used to own a three-wheeler, but it's expensive.

For some youth, outdoor opportunities were not an option because they did not have "free time." They, instead, had to work after school and on weekends or take care of younger siblings.

It is important to note that while the majority of youth who participated in the study agreed BRC did not have a plethora of activities geared towards teenagers, not all described experiencing limited access to outdoor activities. A small group of youth, mostly teens with "good" reputations, regularly enjoyed mountain biking, skiing, snowboarding, and paddling. These youth acknowledged the high cost of these activities but said money was not an issue for their families. They also highlighted the essential role parents played in their ability to partake in outdoor adventures:

One thing that's easy for me is that there's so much outdoors stuff to do and my parents, my dad grew up skiing and kayaking and mountain biking, my mom did too. So, but surprisingly there's not very many kids who ski or kayak.

Like, I know I've always like been interested in rock climbing but it's like your parents have to understand, like you either have to go to camp or your parents have to take you separately.

Limited access to the kinds of activities promoted as essential components of the BRC lifestyle, created a situation in which many youth, especially those from less affluent families, felt detached from BRC. Not participating in the activities that shaped the identity of BRC made it challenging for youth to develop a sense of belonging and prevented some young people from achieving a sense of full membership or citizenship.

A lack of activities, programming or entertainment specifically geared towards teenagers was an issue frequently discussed by youth participants and resulted in youth feeling bored, frustrated, and unsupported. While some youth explained it as part of living in a small town or rural place, others believed it was intentional because some community members did not want to support youth. For example, youth described older residents as unwilling to pay taxes necessary to fund their schools either because they live in BRC part-time or because they no longer have children attending local schools:

Youth 1:	But I think our school not having money at all kind of goes back to the mill levy, that hasn't gotten passed in years.
Youth 2:	By the seniors citizens.
Interviewer:	Hmm.
Youth 1:	Yah, which goes back to the town people that don't care about the kids.
Youth 3:	They won't spend money on the community, cause they're only here for six months every year.
Youth 4:	What is a mill levy?
Youth 1:	It gives, like tax money, it goes to the school.

Youth participants were not the only ones to identify this issue. Conversations with adult community members also reflected the perception that older residents were unsupportive or resentful of teenagers in BRC:

I think the majority of people that live here are retirement folks and folks who

have already put their kids through school, I think we have a lot who are not

very supportive to teen activities or the high school here. In the last two years

we have not had anything pass to upgrade the high school because we have

retirement folks saying, "We don't care."

I mean, I don't know whether you have heard about our schools but the people

in our community shot down almost all of the, what do you call them, the bond

issues, that would have funded better technology, and a better, safer building.

While many adults I spoke to blamed older residents for a lack of funding available for public

schools, the issue seemed to extend to the allocation of other public funds as well. In this letter to

the editor of the newspaper, titled "Space and Time for Loved Ones" the author appeals to the

community at large to rethink funding a dog park in the community and asks instead to consider

funding youth activities:

If I had a nickel for every dog that roams through _____Park, Mariposa would have a

new income, yet the police seem incapable or unwilling to ticket dog owners. Yet we

harass children selling birdhouses or lemonade? Foolishness. Again, thank you to

responsible dog owners, thank you, but at the same time we consider a dog park, we

should be considering more options for the teenagers we vilify and ostracize. What if the

teens had something other than cruising to do on a Saturday night?

This letter publicly acknowledged a lack of recreational and entertainment options for teenagers

and recognized the marginalizing effects this has on young people in the community.

In the next section I describe a tension not discussed in the literature reviewed about

growing up rural: a dilemma informed by the physical environment and characteristics of place,

but manifested in the social interactions of the people who reside in here—a phenomenon BRC residents referred to as "everybody knows everybody."

"Everybody Knows Everybody"

Surrounded by designated wilderness and national forests, and with more tall peaks per square mile than anywhere in the lower 48, BRC is geographically isolated. Yet while the county is engulfed by open space, the places where people congregate are concentrated in a relatively small area. This is because a remarkable 84% of BRC is comprised of public lands managed by agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Division of Wildlife, which leaves a small percentage of land available for community planning, development, and private ownership. The county encompasses 1000 square miles of land but its population of approximately 17,000 is distributed over across only 160 square miles.

This distribution of land preserves BRC's remoteness, which is a commodity essential to the local economy, yet it has implications for how towns in BRC are arranged. This distribution of land creates conditions in which the public life of the population is highly concentrated into small amounts of space. For example, when combined, the three communities of Cielos Claros, Pocas Calas, and Mariposa occupy less than seven square miles, making residents' daily public activities within the community highly visible. Activities such as spending time in parks, shopping, commuting, socializing, and attending school, work or faith based services tend to occur in locations where it is easy to see, and be seen by members of the community. This decreased anonymity.

This arrangement of public spaces in BRC combined with a rural county population of less than 17,000 led to a social phenomenon that was often referenced by residents as everybody knows everybody. Ubiquitous across all data sources, this phrase depicts the experience of living

in a place where social networks overlap, in such a way, that the degrees of separation[7] between people are reduced making it easy to know and be known by all residents. As one adult said, "If people don't know you, you know somebody, who knows somebody." Liam, another adult explained,

> Yeah, I think I know every student. I know every teacher they had, and I probably know them personally. I might know their kids. I might even know their parents. Might know their grandparents.

Liam's comments illustrate how adults who work with youth, especially teachers, can easily amass a large amount of information about young person's life even before a teenager becomes a student in his classroom.

Benefits of being known. The social phenomenon of everybody knowing everybody was described as a characteristic of "small town living" that was highly valued by residents in BRC. Both youth and adults characterized it as an important and special aspect of this place because it created a "tight knit community" where people felt comfortable, safe, supported, and intimately connected to one another. Caleb depicted this feeling when he said, "It's just you know everybody. It's really a community-feel, like "Hi." Like you say to hi to everybody, you know everybody. It's like you're never really lonely, there's always someone." During interviews and focus groups, youth identified multiple benefits of living in a place where people are connected in this way. Youth said it increased the safety of the community because it made it easy to identify outsiders and look out for trouble. Most offered stories in which they conveyed feeling "looked after" or "taken care of" on account of being known. One youth told a story about how other kids took care of him when he missed several consecutive weeks of school,

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[7] Six degrees of separation refers to the idea that everyone on earth is, through our relationships, at most, six people away from any other person on earth. It was an idea first put forth by Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy in 1929; it was popularized in 1990 by American playwright John Guare.

I was gone for a couple of weeks and I didn't know what was going on, but like

everybody knows me so they called me up, you know like, hey you missed this and this.

According to youth, another benefit of everybody knowing everybody was that it made it

easy to develop friendships. Youth agreed this phenomenon reduced the number of cliques or

enemies among their peers because "everyone hangs out together at some point" while attending

school. One teenager described it like this, "So even though you may hang out with a particular

group of people, you still know the jocks, the artistic kids, you still have friends in each little

group." The longer you live in BRC, the more people know you and the easier it was to create

social networks.

Problems with being known. Feeling known could be a positive experience but it could

also be problematic. And while most youth identified everybody knowing everybody as

something they appreciated about living in BRC, there were also youth who simultaneously

described it as one of the most challenging aspects of growing up here. Mateo said,

It's so small like, I like sneeze and the dude across the street knows what color my socks

are, you know like it sucks, but at the same time it's kind of good I guess.

Mateo's comment, and others like it, indicate that in a place where everyone is connected,

information travels fast making it impossible to keep people from knowing personal details of

one's life. "There are no secrets in BRC" or similar statements were comments I heard frequently

during my time here. I also saw this perception embedded in interviews, focus groups, and

artifacts. In a book written about BRC the authors wrote:

Newcomers quickly learned you didn't talk trash about anybody because everybody was

related by blood or marriage. And there were no secrets because closets didn't have doors

and skeletons were plain to see.

As a result, even the most private matters seemed to make it into the public realm. Participants told stories about community members (youth and adults) who shared knowledge about youth's family histories, trouble with law enforcement, sexual encounters, alcohol, tobacco and other drug use (ATOD), and health status (physical and mental). This scenario was depicted in this youth interview:

Interviewer: So you have been here for three years, what have been the best parts of living here for you?

Youth: Some of the best things about here is, well one of the best and the worst, it kind of goes both ways, is that it's a small community.

Interviewer: Okay.

Youth: And that's great as in like you know everybody and they know you, but it's also bad in the same sense,

Interviewer: Why?

Youth: With reputations, like if you have something you don't want anybody to know, but somebody finds out the whole town ends up knowing within a couple days,

Interviewer: Okay.

Youth: Cause, since it's so small it just travels fast.

Interviewer: And what's the problem with people knowing that stuff?

Youth: I don't know like personal things, like well if you had a family member of a friend who's a drug addict, but you know nobody really knew,

Interviewer: Right.

Youth: But somebody found out, and they didn't want anybody to know, but then everybody ends up knowing it's just kind of an emotional breakdown.

Other youth who had experiences with substance abuse, domestic violence or law enforcement talked about what it was like when their private affairs were "thrown out into the community." Many described feeling angry as was evident in this focus group:

Interviewer: Have you ever had someone know something about you that you didn't know they knew?

Youth: Yah, I have, and it will surprise, it will just blow me away. I'll come up to a person and come up and be like, "Hi, how have you been? I haven't talked to you in forever" and they're like, "I heard you were into drugs." And it's just like eerrr, what? And then I was like, from who? And it's like, I don't know it's the talk of the parents and stuff, my mom told me. And she's like, "I'm just worried about you." It's like, no, no, no, don't tell me you're worried about me, you don't know anything that's going on in my life. I'd probably get all like, in your face, up front, big headed because it's my biggest pet peeve when people try to tell me how I am.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Youth: I just want to slap people honestly. Don't tell me how I am, I am the only one who knows me. So when people try to do that to me I really get in their face and I get really angry and I don't handle it like I'm supposed to, civilized. I just get really angry.

In this excerpt, this teenager objected to the sharing of the information and not the accuracy of the information. She was upset that something as personal as her struggle with drug use was something being talked about in her absence. She was angry that people were forming opinions and making judgments without having the whole story.

In addition to feeling angry, youth also described the experience as uncomfortable or "creepy." This was especially the case if the "knower" of their most intimate secrets was someone they did not know well and had specific information that youth themselves did not personally share. In one focus group, a teen described a scenario in which a school official approached her and asked why her parents had sent her away from home to live with her grandparents. She was surprised because she had not yet been introduced to this person. This made her uncomfortable and the interaction caused her to question what else this official knew about her personal life and how he received the information. In another focus group, two youth discussed their thoughts about an adult at their school who would periodically "check in" with them about how things were going at school:

> Me and Brandy we would be walking in the high school and _name of adult_ would be there, whatever I don't know what he's doing. But there would be kids walking and we'd be just in a bunch of groups walking to our next class, he'd pick us both out for no reason and have us come in there and have a meeting with him to check up on us. I think that's wrong. He does not need to get involved like that.

In an interview Mateo, described his experience with being known by a police officer in the community. In this excerpt Mateo depicts how relationships developed over time in a small community added to the complexity of the issue:

> I've known that cop for a long time and he knows all my brothers and my dad and like he used to come and arrest my Dad when my Dad would get all drunk and belligerent at my house, so yah, he's known me for awhile. He also knows me from, well I used to take lessons from him, because I was on the baseball team when I was little. So I was a really good baseball player, I still am a really good player, but he used to be my coach. He, he like hassles me more than anybody. And he knows everything about me cause he used to

be my coach when I was little and now he is a police officer and he knows like, my entire

record and when he sees me he pulls over and makes a point to like, you know like say

something to me whether it's negative or positive.

While the adults youth talked about in the last three excerpts may have had the best of intentions

when they initiated contact with the youth, these young people made it clear they did not

appreciate being singled out and described feeling uneasy about not having the ability to control

access to their personal information.

Everybody knowing everybody had implications for youth identity development. For

example, youth often discussed how everybody knowing everybody made it difficult to

experiment with or forge new identities. Caleb, a youth researcher explained,

Caleb:	Just like, here it's like you're kind of stuck with, with the way people think you are. Like you can't just like, like in Denver you can just go up to somebody and be like you know, whoever you want to be almost. Like I mean you're still who you are but
Interviewer:	I think I get what you're saying,
Caleb:	You know what I'm saying? You're just like a new person to them and they're a new person to you. Here like everybody knows, everybody knows who you are so it's just like, who you are, you know?

Caleb's comments highlight how being known for being a certain type of person in BRC

contributed to how youth perceived themselves and how this could result in feeling "stuck" in a

particular identity. In a focus group, youth reflected a similar sentiment:

| Youth 1: | When you do something wrong in this town you're pretty much that, They just know you. That's who you are. |
| Interviewer: | Who knows you? |

Youth 1:   Everyone.

Youth 2:   The cops know you as that.

Youth 1:   It's such a small town everyone knows you.

Youth 2:   Like me and _____ we did, we stole once and everyone thinks now

            that we are thieves like,

Youth 1:   Right and because of this stuff, they think, we're not ever gonna

            change.

Youth 2:   Ever.

Here youth described how everybody knowing everybody set the stage for individuals to be labeled or positioned in ways that were damaging and not easily undone in the community.

This experience was not limited to youth. Adults also expressed anxiety about people finding out personal information and how it might impact their day-to-day existence. One educator told me a story about how after a night out drinking with friends, she "was falling out of the bar" and ran into colleagues who provided substance abuse counseling in town. She said she was "so worried" about losing her job but was relieved when nothing happened.

Of course, in county of 17,000 people the reality is that it's difficult, if not impossible, to know every person, especially as the population increases. But while most participants recognized the reality, most agreed that when you are living in BRC, it feels like everybody knows everybody.

Summary

In the last three decades, BRC has forged a new identity. Its transformation from a struggling agricultural community to a place revered for its natural splendor, thriving arts culture, and outdoor lifestyle have positioned this area as one of the nation's dream locations—a rural idyll. Teenagers who inhabit this place, however, told a different story.

Youth growing up in BRC described it, instead, as a place where young people were seen as problematic members of the community, ostracized on account of their age, and excluded from participating in community life. Relationships between adolescents and adults in the public arena were described as contentious with youth being unwelcome in public spaces and unfairly targeted or blamed for the actions of others. Despite the many activities available in BRC, the majority of youth reported feeling bored and portrayed BRC as a place with few options for employment, entertainment or recreational pursuits that appealed, were accessible, or were intended to meet the needs of youth. The few places or activities that were designed specifically for youth were often described as "too organized" by adults and highly restrictive, which was exemplified by the description of a new venue recently opened for youth called The Spot.

Features of the physical environment in and surrounding BRC also contributed to an important social phenomenon, specific to living in a rural and sparsely populated area. This phenomenon, while often described as a favorite aspect of living in a small town, created challenges for youth. Everybody knowing everybody resulted in unsettling experiences, especially for youth who were already dealing with challenging situations such as substance abuse, domestic violence or trouble with law enforcement. For these youth feeling known caused discomfort, self-consciousness, and, youth argued, it influenced their social identity and reputational status in the community, which I will expand upon in the following two chapters. While many studies about place focus on the physical aspects of space, rather than social experiences within these spaces, it became evident during this study that unhinging the physical world from the social world was not possible. This is because the physical features of BRC were woven into the values, norms, and attitudes of its' inhabitants—a resource residents drew from when they assigned meaning and value to activities and social groups. Next, I describe the social identities available to teenagers in BRC and how being known for specific characteristics or

attributes affected youth, especially those who were assigned "bad" reputations.

CHAPTER VI

REPUTATIONS IN "DREAMTOWN"

Overview

Youth researchers identified the concept of youth reputations as an essential component

of growing up rural; a phenomenon that impacted youths' lives in significant ways. In this

chapter, I discuss how the YPAR team conceptualized reputations and why this concept became

central to my investigation about the construction idle identities. I show the kinds of reputations

youth believed were available to them in BRC and describe the effects of having a negative

reputation in a small town. The subsequent chapter (Chapter 7) will discuss *how* these identities

were formed.

Defining Youth Reputations

During the first week of the Summer Research Institute, I asked youth researchers to

brainstorm aspects of BRC they believed led young people to engage or disengage in academic

and community life. The brainstorm was the first in a series of activities designed to spark group

thinking about topics to investigate during the YPAR project. During this process, the team

identified and discussed a variety of obstacles to youth engagement. The list included: "There's

nothing to do here," "School's not interesting to kids," "Problems with drugs and alcohol," "Kids

don't feel welcome," and "Trouble with the law."

The concept of youth reputations surfaced during a group discussion about the

differential treatment of youth in the community. More specifically, youth were discussing why

some were invited to participate in aspects of school and community life, while others were

excluded. Tony, a youth researcher, mentioned that he thought the reason teens were excluded

was "based off their reputation." Taking a different view, Kat said, youth were invited to

participate (or not) based upon individual merit. In her words, "Youth are treated the way they

act." Jack, however, was quick to disagree with Kat and provided an example about how he was once turned down for a job because the manager implied he did not trust Jack's family. Kat responded by saying it was true that sometimes people were treated unfairly, but she countered, "Usually if you hear something, there is some truth to it." At this point, the conversation exploded. Everyone talked at once and the volume in the room increased significantly. Some youth expressed appreciation for Kat's perspective, but others disagreed vehemently. Everyone started to tell stories about how they, or someone they knew, had been affected by a reputation in BRC.

At first, youth only told stories about what happened when an individual was perceived in a negative way. But then the conversation shifted to include narratives about how individuals were also affected by being known in a positive way. In addition, the group started to debate how reputations informed interactions with friends, teachers, and parents. What started as a structured 30-minute activity, with just one half of the group talking, quickly transformed into a 90-minute free-for-all during which everyone participated.

The next day, youth researchers worked in small groups to consider the issues identified in the brainstorm and draft potential research questions. Interest about reputations remained high and the heated debates continued. While youth researchers agreed reputation was an important factor in the lives of youth in BRC, they disagreed about who was responsible for a teenager's reputation and argued about how it affected youth in everyday life. Ultimately the YPAR team designed a study to learn more about their peers' experiences with reputations. To investigate this phenomenon, the team created surveys and conducted focus groups that asked peers to talk about their different reputations across multiple contexts. The goal was to gather a variety of perspectives that would help us to understand the kinds of youth reputations that existed in the community, the process by which reputations were formed, and how reputations influenced

youth engagement in academic and community life. For the purpose of the study, youth researchers defined reputations as "an image or a way you are viewed by others."

I was intrigued by the way youth researchers talked about the phenomenon. Their conversations included themes similar to those represented in the research about adolescent identity formation and in the literature I had read about the construction of social identities. For example, while some team members believed a reputation was the result of individual actions or behavior, others argued individual behavior was not the only contributing factor. These youth contended, instead, that a reputation was informed by membership in or relationship to different social groups, (e.g. peer groups, athletic teams) and was dependent upon social interactions within the community.

The topic also appeared to resonate for residents who were not part of the YPAR project. Two weeks into the project, an adult community member I had met once at a CYS event earlier in the summer stopped me on the street and said, "I heard the kids are researching reputations, very timely," which referred to an ongoing debate about mandatory drug testing for high school athletes. Another adult said, "I will be interested in hearing what the kids think their role is in getting a reputation." During interviews, adults shared personal stories about their own experiences with reputations that not only corroborated youth perspectives about the influence of a reputation in this community, but added dimensions to the phenomenon that I had not yet considered. Consider this excerpt from my first interview with an adult:

Interviewer: Tell me, what do you make of this concept of youth reputations?

Liam: I think to me that is one of the scariest things that you'll find. My oldest, you know, he, I call him a system breaker.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Liam: If a system is going straight, he's zigging left and right all the time.

Interviewer: Okay, how old is he?

Liam: He's 7 and he has a reputation

Interviewer: As what?

Liam: Bad kid, troublemaker who doesn't fall in line.

Interviewer: And he is 7?

Liam: Mm hmm. It's followed him since he was 4, since we showed up in this town. He got black listed in soccer. We keep telling people, people say "oh well this person said your son was too rough." So he wouldn't get on the teams. They wouldn't contact us about soccer. This is a 4 year old.

Interviewer: Hmmm.

Liam: A 4 year old. I mean, if you can't as an adult, a community, overcome that, at that level of innocence and naivety, and engage it and get your hands dirty. You know, that, that tells you a lot about small town…This last year we signed him up, so it's 3 years later and someone came over [to me] and said, "your son's not that bad." I was like, what do you mean my son's not that bad? What are you talking about? "Oh I just heard that he was really, really, really rough and kind of violent and stuff." And I was like, who told you that?

Liam's story placed an emphasis on the role of the community in shaping youth reputations and demonstrated, that in BRC youth reputations started early, which was an element I had not yet heard youth discuss. He also implied that having a reputation was somehow connected to the experience of living in a small town. During an interview with another adult, Cristina, made similar references. After she told a story about how she learned youth reputations were important to her son, she leaned over and whispered,

I am raising a son here, and he has a reputation about certain things so I try to take others with a grain of salt, but it's such a small town Kristen, I mean you mention something about a kid and everybody knows who it is, everybody.

The youth researchers identified a phenomenon that was meaningful to youth, related to my conceptual framework, and was salient in the lives of community members. From my vantage point as an ethnographer, reputations were *the* central force mediating the production of identities, and deserved further investigation. Once the YPAR project was complete, I continued to explore youth reputations in my interviews, focus groups, and fieldwork. Analyses of these collective data revealed reputations shaped the social identities of youth, which influenced their ability to access learning opportunities in the community. In the next section I discuss the kinds of reputations available to youth in BRC and detail the criteria used to ascribe different reputations to different youth.

Youth Reputations in BRC: "Good Kids" and "Bad Kids"

Youth and adults used two terms to categorize youth in BRC: "good kids" and "bad kids." During the study, these terms showed up in every interview and focus group. In 40% of the surveys youth used theses specific phrases to describe themselves (or others) or they referenced the categories indirectly. Examples of indirect references on the surveys, included responses such as, "There are two kinds of teens in this community: good and bad. The community can tell by looking." And "Well, most of the community thinks that teens are either bad or good." These data raised important questions, such as what constitutes being "good" or "bad" and who gets to decide?

Thematic analyses of talk and written responses about "good kids" and "bad kids" revealed the activities and behaviors that people used to assign meaning to each category. "Good kids" included young people who were involved in sports, participated in community life, were

perceived as following rules, got recognized in local publications, and were quiet, obedient and received "good" grades at school. The "bad kids," on the other hand, were youth caught not following the rules, smoked tobacco, drank alcohol, used illegal substances, received "bad" grades at school, engaged in sexual activity, and were involved with the court system. In addition, these youth created more work for adults, were angry, and challenged authority.

Although youth participated in an assortment of activities and behaviors from each category, decisions about which category a young person "belonged" to were made based upon the aspect of their identity that individuals were most known for, or was most visible to the community. For example, it was possible for a young person to be categorized as a "good kid" if he drank alcohol but was on the football team or for a teenager to be thought of as a "bad kid" if she received good grades and was pregnant.

Adult talk about youth, as well as teenager's descriptions of themselves, made it evident that this binary framework was used to determine a youth's reputational status in BRC. Another source of evidence was the way youth researchers chose to categorize youth responses during the analysis process. In the next section, I show how youth in BRC applied this framework to make sense of the kinds of activities that informed a "good" or "bad" reputation and how they were viewed in the community.

The results from the first open-ended question on the YPAR survey, "What reputations do you have and where do they affect you the most?" provided a snapshot of the kinds of reputations youth thought were available to them in their community and how these identities mapped onto the good/bad framework. The YPAR group reviewed, analyzed, and sorted the 86 participant responses into three categories: positive, negative and unknown.

In most cases, youth researchers made low inference decisions about which category the response should be placed in based upon language used in the response. For example, if a

participant wrote, "I have a good reputation" the response was placed in the positive category because the respondent had used the word good. Youth researchers also made higher inference determinations. To accomplish this they drew meaning from their understanding of community norms and values. For example, when respondents used the word, "Bitch," youth researchers decided this term was negative because they believed the term was generally interpreted by their community to be negative. When youth researchers encountered language they believed had more than one meaning in their community, and the meaning the respondent gave to the reputation was unclear, analysts placed the response in the unknown category. For example, "Skater" was a reputation that could be interpreted by adults as negative but amongst youth was generally thought of as positive.

Youth researchers tallied the responses to this question and found 32% of youth reported having a "good" reputation or a reputation described as positive for the respondent. Examples of positive responses include: "A good one. It affects me mainly at work," "Diligent and hard working. It has allowed me several job opportunities," "Good ones, a wrestler and a bull rider," and "I have a good reputation." Forty-one percent of the responses indicated participants thought they a "bad" or negative reputation. Examples of negative reputations included, "Bad kid, I guess," "Pain in the ass," "Bitch," "Whore," "Stoner," "Loser," "Low life," and "A shitty one because of my decisions." And 27% of responses were deemed unknown. Examples of these responses were "Skater," "Being the quiet kid," "Computer geek," and "Preppy." Two each of "I don't know" and "I don't have one" responses were also included in this category. The responses to this question illustrated a spectrum of possible reputations for youth in BRC. The ubiquity of the good/bad framework was underscored for me when the youth researchers applied it to the survey data. While there was a third category (unknown), youth researchers used it more like a "parking lot" for responses until they could determine a good/bad designation. This process

revealed, that even when teenagers constructed their own framework for categorizing reputations they opted to utilize a binary classification system. The use of the framework, however, did not indicate that all youth agreed with it, which I will examine in the next chapter.

Analysis of answers to this question sparked the interest of the YPAR group and spurred thoughtful conversations amongst the team. For example, YPAR members contested the accuracy of respondent's descriptions about their reputations and questioned why their peers felt known for certain aspects of their identity. During one discussion, Angel declared, "Wait, how would I know my reputation? If you wanted to know my reputation you'd need to ask everyone else." These debates questioned the difference between a social identity and a young person's self-perception. Some youth researchers were surprised so many of their peers described having a negative reputation, while others reflected on the sheer negativity of the language youth participants used to describe themselves. For example, Beth remarked, "Can you imagine what it must be like to just go around everyday thinking, "I'm a whore," or thinking people see you as a whore?"

The Impact of Being Labeled a "Bad Kid"

Being labeled as a "bad kid" created challenges for youth. They lost friends, were unable to find work, and were not recruited to participate in educational or leadership opportunities available for teens in the community. Additionally, youth described a variety of situations that left them feeling mistreated and misunderstood. These collective experiences led to a succession of negative emotions, which decreased youths' well being and made it difficult for them to imagine and seek productive futures. In this section I present data to illustrate how having a "bad" reputation affected youth's lives in BRC. I chose to focus on the experience of "bad kids" because having a "bad" reputation contributed to youth idleness and disconnection. The themes represented here were informed by a grounded theory approach. I started by using open codes to

separate data, from multiple data sources, into broad categories. Once data were categorized, I printed out all excerpts within each code and cut them into pieces that could be physically manipulated. Next, I created sub categories within each category. A sub category consisted of three or more excerpts. I repeated this process several times within each category, and across categories, until I was unable to identify any new information or insights. Fracturing the data in this way enabled me to create visual displays that facilitated the exploration of links and relationships amongst the categories. Once categories and subcategories were formulated, I used axial coding to reconstruct what I had learned about the central phenomenon—reputation. This layered process guided me to identify themes and patterns, look for a range of youth experiences, and search for counter examples, while moving towards providing a descriptive and meaningful account of how reputations operated in BRC.

Friendships Interrupted

One effect of having a "bad" reputation discussed by youth was disrupted relationships with peers. While some teens acknowledged they distanced themselves from friends involved with negative behaviors, participants (youth and adults) more often attributed lost friendships to pressure exerted by parents who advised their children to "stay away" from youth with "bad" reputations or made it difficult for their children to engage with "bad kids" by threatening punishment or restricting access. Mateo explained, "I've heard parents tell their kids, my friends, to stay away from me because I was a "bad kid." I couldn't even go over to my friend's houses." Beth described a situation in which a friend's parent refused to let her visit or communicate (talk or text) with her daughter. When she attempted to address the situation with the parent she felt "shut down:"

> My friend's mom saw me smoking, and now I can't hang out with my friend. I smoke but I would never push her to smoke. I tried talking to her [mom]. I went to where she

works, at the motel, but she said I was a bad influence, walked away, and slammed the

door in my face.

After the encounter with this parent, Beth said her friend was uncomfortable about spending time

with her when they were at school because the friend was nervous her mom would find out and

she would be punished.

Youth described lost friendships as a painful consequence of being referred to as a "bad

kid," one that left them feeling abandoned and unsupported by people they "thought they could

trust." The longer youth felt stigmatized by their reputation, the more they worried about being

rejected by their peers, and the more wary they became of socializing and forging new

friendships.

Limited Employment and Educational Opportunities

Another effect of having a negative reputation in BRC was that it limited employment

and educational opportunities. Participants consistently described "bad kids" as unable to find

jobs or to be considered for membership in a variety of groups at school and in the community.

As one youth stated, "You mess up once, everyone knows about it, and then it becomes hard to

find a job." In his interview, Mateo described his experience looking for work:

Like when I go in to fill out an application for a job I get looked down upon because I

have been in trouble and my last name is ____ and my Dad has had trouble. So when

they see me they just don't take me seriously. I'll fill out an application and give it back

to them then I'll call and say "Hey did you guys check over my application?" You know,

and they're like, "Oh yah, we'll get back to you in a few days." I never get a call back,

ever.

A second reason why young people known as "bad kids" had difficulty finding work, was

that youth used their reputation as a resource to make sense of the kinds of opportunities they

thought were available to them. For example, when we were recruiting youth researchers for the YPAR project, three candidates (at different times) expressed doubt about their ability to participate. When I asked them about their concerns they explained that they didn't think they would be chosen because, "I am a felon," "I am learning disabled," and "I am habitually disruptive." This indicated that youth used these labels, which were constructed by adults, to limit their own access to opportunities in the community.

Youth also reported not being able to qualify for positions in internships, extracurricular programs or leadership opportunities in the community. In an interview, one youth explained that once he stopped attending the traditional high school and pursued an alternative educational path, he felt unwelcome to continue his music studies at the high school, "I don't know, apparently the teachers just don't want me over there doing Band. It's kind of weird." He said he thought it was "weird" because he did not have any problems with the band instructor and according to school district policies he still qualified for participation. In a focus group, another youth discussed how she would like to get involved as a volunteer reading to elementary school children, "I'd love to do community service and read to little kids but it is kind of hard to walk in and ask because, well, because I dropped out [of school] for awhile." This comment conveyed her interest in getting involved and her belief that it was unlikely she would be allowed to participate because she had left high school prior to graduating.

Once youth had a negative reputation it became increasingly difficult to access opportunities. Adults were unwilling to hire or recruit youth who had a negative image and youth started to make decisions about which opportunities to pursue because they believed it was unlikely they would be accepted. This sequence of events resulted in youth having limited access to environments, in which they could learn the knowledge and skills necessary to make a successful transition to adulthood.

Youth Felt "Singled Out"

Youth reported a variety of situations in which they felt "singled out" by adults and treated differently than their peers because of their reputation. They described incidents at school in which they were demeaned by teachers in front of their classmates or were subjected to humiliating searches. Youth were particularly troubled about being "singled out" by teachers because they expected teachers, more than other adults, to have a greater understanding of teenager's lives, and be willing to help out. In a focus group, a teenager explained:

> A teacher is supposed to accept everybody. Their job is to teach everybody to their ability. Their job is not to say this kid is a troublemaker and single you out or whatever. They're supposed to look at you all the same.

One youth talked about her experience during a focus group:

Youth: Yah, there were rumors about me. People said I smoked crack. When the drug dogs were on campus they searched my locker and stuff in front of everyone, it was during passing periods and they searched my locker. Which they are not supposed to do. They took out everything. They ripped down all my papers, my pictures, everything…They made me empty my pockets, take off my jacket, and take off my top shirt, yah it was nice.

Interviewer: Did they find anything?

Youth: Midol. I got in trouble for having Midol without the nurse's permission. That's why I don't go to school there anymore.

This young woman's narrative suggested school officials violated their own protocol by conducting a search during a time when her privacy could not be protected. According to the teen, this made her look "guilty" of having something "really bad" even though what she had in her possession was Midol. The experience of being searched in front of her peers fueled her

reputation as a "bad kid" and increased the likelihood that she would be targeted by adults in the future. She went on to explain that although she "really liked to learn," "felt privileged to have an education," and "used to love school," she started to "dread going to school everyday" and eventually stopped attending.

In an interview, a youth researcher described a similar situation:

Mateo: Everyday like repeatedly, it was routine. Like I'd go into the office and dump my backpack out on the desk so they could swift through my stuff and then I'd go back to class. Of course, after a while, I rebelled because I was searched everyday. They didn't let me walk without, you know, being watched over.

Interviewer: Did they catch you with anything?

Mateo: No, I have never been caught on school property with anything.

Youth with "good" reputations told similar stories; according to these youth, "bad kids" were also mistreated in public spaces in the community:

Interviewer: You mentioned only some kids get harassed. Who is getting harassed?

Youth 1: Not everybody,

Youth 2: Not everybody,

Youth 3: Specific people.

Youth 4: Like specific groups.

Youth 3: Specifically people around our age.

Youth 4: Who, who mess up once or twice,

Youth 1: And then the cops figure, oh that's a "bad kid" even though, you know you could have messed up three years ago, stayed clean the rest of them three years but everybody will still look at you like you're a "bad kid."

Youth 4:   Yah.

Youth 3:   You can go out and help the community a thousand times but that one

              time you messed up everybody still sees that instead of the good you do.

Interviewer: How do you know they still see it?

Youth 1:   They judge you.

Youth 2:   It's just the way they treat you.

Youth 4:   It's the way they talk to you, the way they look at you, like the tone of

              their voice.

Youth 1:   Some people just won't even look at you.

Youth 3:   Yah, some people won't even look at you or talk to you.

Youth 4:   Yah, they'll just walk right by you.

Youth 5:   Some people act snotty towards you.

Youth 6:   Talk down to you.

Youth 2:   Yah, they'll talk down to you like you're not as good as them.

This excerpt confirmed the perspective that "bad kids" were singled out based on previous events and were treated poorly. It also suggested that once a young person was categorized as a "bad kid" it was difficult to change this perception. Because this group had described all teenagers as being hassled in public spaces, I asked them to explain the difference between the treatment of "good kids" and "bad kids." They said, youth with "bad" reputations were more likely to be "targeted," received "harsher" consequences, and were treated with "less respect" than the average teen.

Unpleasant interactions in which youth felt singled out, mistreated, and embarrassed by adults led to increased anxiety for youth about future interactions and created a general sense of uneasiness that pervaded every domain of their lives: friends, family, school and community. As

a result youth felt angry, frustrated, and discouraged. These feelings were reflected throughout surveys, interviews, and focus groups with youth who identified as having a "bad" reputation:

> The teachers always put me down. It makes me so angry. (Survey)

> It makes you feel uncomfortable, weird, people just look at you and whisper, no matter where you are. They just analyze every piece of you. And you don't want to talk. You don't want to do anything. You're just like, screw this!" (Focus group)

Youth who had these experiences in multiple contexts, over time also conveyed a sense of hopelessness. These youth believed there was no way to alter their status in the community and improve their day-to-day life. In a focus group, one youth expressed why she felt her situation would not improve:

> Interviewer: Do you think it is possible to change the way the community views you?
>
> Youth: I mean you could always try, but once you're something is this town, you're that, that's just who you are…pretty much, whatever you do is not good enough for this town. Everything you do is going to be judged in some way by this town and you just have to deal with it until you can leave.

Living in the Shadows

Analyses revealed youth participants with "bad" reputations felt "known" and "singled out" for what were perceived as negative attributes or aspects of their identity. These same youth, however, described feeling "invisible" because they were not recognized for the "good" aspects of their identity and because the challenges they faced were not acknowledged in meaningful ways.

Feeling unrecognized for having positive attributes was evidenced by comments throughout the surveys such as: "People think I am bad but they don't give me a chance to prove myself" and "I am not as bad as people think I am." One youth wrote about adults at his school, "They don't know the real me. All they see is my label." In several focus groups, youth maintained that despite doing "bad things" like smoking marijuana, ditching school, and getting "bad" grades, they were "good people." These youth expressed a strong desire to receive recognition for their "good" qualities and described the experience of living in a place where they were not recognized for being a productive member of the community as exhausting: "You just start to feel beat down" and "You just get tired of always being bagged on."

Youth said they felt unseen because they were obscured by "good kids," who excelled at things "that matter to adults" such as academics or athletics or who participated in jobs and leadership opportunities. Youth who struggled with problems at home, issues with substance abuse, mental illness, or trouble with law enforcement said they felt invisible because adults did not consider the circumstances they dealt with on a daily basis, and as a result responded to youth actions in severe, arbitrary, or uninformed ways. In his interview, Mateo talked about his experience during the seventh and eighth grades:

Mateo: No one ever took into account, like I couldn't just go home and do homework like a normal like, I didn't have like a time, a specific time, like no one told me, go sit down and do your homework.

Interviewer: Yah

Mateo: I didn't have the time to do homework. Homework wasn't even, it's like how can I do homework if my home doesn't work? That is pretty much the picture, you know like and like most people, teachers are like, you didn't do your homework, you didn't care, blah, blah, blah instead of like

> really looking like, well why didn't you do homework? Why aren't
>
> you doing your homework?

Interviewer: Did anyone ever ask you that?

Mateo: No, no they was always like, you didn't do your homework, that's another

> assignment missing. And I'm like cool, chart it out, put that on my tab.

What Mateo objected to most, was that adults reacted as though he didn't care about school. But he said, he did care, he was just unable to figure out how to complete his homework. He explained that after a couple of years "getting zeros" (for his assignments) he started to get discouraged.

Youth expressed the belief that adults were unwilling to recognize difficult circumstances because they were invested in upholding the image of BRC as idyllic. An acknowledgement of their lives and problems would alter this perception. In his interview, one youth remarked,

> People don't want to hear about my crappy life. They rather hear how great the swim
>
> team is or talk about how wonderful it is to live in such a beautiful place. I feel like
>
> I am always in the shadows.

The phrase "in the shadows" referred to the experience of living in a place where the difficulties that made his life "crappy" were not recognized, which made it difficult for people to see him and his life clearly.

Youth with "bad" reputations were not the only ones who shared this belief. Youth who had "good" reputations expressed similar ideas about residents wanting to create a "perfect" image for the public schools in the area:

> They [adults] try and make is seem like the public schools are a perfect little world like
>
> nothing bad is happening…They try to cover stuff up, like drinking and getting high, but
>
> kids are coming back high from lunch over there [at the high school] everyday.

Adults also acknowledged that many residents were unwilling to recognize problems because it would alter their perception of BRC:

> Well I think that many of our retirees see this valley as their little bit of heaven. And that's why they resent these kids, especially the ones who are poor or struggling with drugs or alcohol.
>
> You know there is more poverty here than anybody ever realized. But nobody wants to know. If you recognize it, you have to deal with it…You will have to get involved with the community, the parents, the families…You would have to come off the hill on the side of the valley where all the retired, rich people are.

This last comment I interpreted as meaning if residents acknowledged problems in the community then there would be a need to take action: for example, reallocate resources, time, and energy. In a focus group, youth depicted problematic issues in the community as being the "dark side" of BRC:

> Youth 1:   It's like this nice, quiet, little mountain town with, you know, this little ski lodge over here. You know, there's clean air,
>
> Youth 2:   Old people like clean air,
>
> Youth 1:   Yah, just a nice chill little town…and no one wants to think about the dark side.

When asked to say more about the "dark side" youth explained it as where "bad" things happen in BRC, "the things that no one wants to talk about" such as drug use, child abuse, and poverty.

Data suggested youth and adult participants understood why some young people felt unseen and portrayed the lives of these youth as being eclipsed by the identity of BRC. This was because talking about the activities and problems youth faced that contributed to having a "bad"

reputation would interrupt the identity of BRC as a "dream" location and make it unattractive to tourists, retirees or potential home buyers. It would deter people from wanting to visit or relocate.

While segments of the BRC population were unwilling to acknowledge the challenges that contributed to youth being categorized as "bad kids" in BRC, there were however, educators, social service providers, and youth advocates who demonstrated an awareness of the problems youth encountered and worked tirelessly to address these issues. In some interviews, adults used the term "bad kids" to refer to youth, but in other instances I asked the interviewees to help me understand what this phrase meant. Adults commonly described "bad kids" as youth who were coping with challenging life circumstances, which led to participation in activities or behaviors that damaged their reputation. In an interview with an adult, Clara said, "These are kids dealing with stuff that most adults would not want to deal with in their lives, like a crazy home life, stuff at school, death and abuse." I interpreted her comment, and others like it, as recognition of the contextual factors that affect youth and influenced behaviors.

Another common perspective was that "bad kids" were youth who made "mistakes" and were judged based on these events. Moira (also an adult) said:

Interviewer: When you say "bad" kids what does that mean to you?

Moira: They're not bad. I mean they're making mistakes. They're not out there harming people. They're not you know assaulting people. You know they're making genuine mistakes whether they're using alcohol or drugs to get on probation, which is harming themselves more than anything.

Moira went on to explain that despite the common use of the term, most of the behaviors that earned youth a "bad" reputation in BRC were not "really bad," by she which meant immoral and were characterized by using methamphetamine or committing sexually violent crimes, but were

instead considered harmful to youth. In addition, many of these adults portrayed engagement in activities that were considered "bad" as not out of the ordinary for youth; and acknowledged participating in similar activities during their own teenage years.

But while this group of adults conveyed a sense of understanding, compassion, and concern for young people as they navigated adolescence, data suggested many youth with "bad" reputations in this study did not experience adult behaviors in a way that left them feeling looked after, cared for, or understood. They described adults, instead, as lacking perspective about what its like to be a teenager:

> I understand they're trying to make us see the mistakes they made and they don't want us to make the same mistakes and all. But when we do make the same mistakes it makes us no different than them. Yet they still judge us for it. They need to remember they made the same mistakes.

Some youth portrayed adult responses to their actions as factors that contributed to their development of a "bad" reputation. In a focus group, one youth told a story about his friend that conveyed this point:

> Youth: So my friend smoked a little bit of weed, not too bad, not too much. He's a smart kid, he's cool, he's a good football player. But people found out and he started to get a reputation, which turned him into a "bad kid."
>
> Interviewer: Are you saying it was the coaches' fault because he got kicked off the team?
>
> Youth: No. He didn't get kicked off the team but they treated him with disrespect and made him look the fool you know. They made him take a fucking UA [urinalysis] and all this other bullshit. He already had some problems at home, but this just made it worse but they didn't care. Now he is fighting

with his aunt and uncle, can't live at home. All this stuff happening to him

all because of his reputation. I'm just saying, it's not just about what we

do it's about how adults react to us. You can't win.

This narrative implied that this teenager believed a "bad" reputation was not solely the result of a

young person's actions, but was instead, the result of how adults made sense of and reacted to a

young person's actions.

Summary

Reputations were an important part of life for youth growing up in BRC. Youth with

"good" reputations, often those who were athletes, had good grades, and came from prominent

families, were offered jobs and other opportunities to practice and develop skills and behaviors

that would help them make a successful transition into adulthood. In contrast, youth with "bad"

reputations, generally kids who did not have good grades, were perceived as sexually active, did

not participate in extracurricular activities (aside from mandated intervention programs),

struggled with substance abuse, or made extra work for adults, were ostracized. These youth lost

friends, had limited job prospects, were not chosen for leadership opportunities, were excluded

from a variety of programs and activities, and experienced interactions that decreased their well-

being. Young people with "bad" reputations felt singled out and noticed only for their negative

characteristics. One youth described this experience as being "in the shadows." This phrase

indicated that youth felt eclipsed by the presence of "good kids" and by adult efforts to preserve

the identity of BRC as a rural idyll.

Finally, this chapter highlighted youth perspectives about the role adults played in the

construction of youth reputations. Young people argued that reputations were not solely created

by youth actions, but were instead, contributed to by the ways adults conceptualized and reacted

to youth behaviors. In the next chapter, I present data that expands this discussion and show what

analyses revealed about how reputations were formed in BRC.

CHAPTER VII

THE LIFE CYCLE OF A REPUTATION

Overview

How did youth reputations start and what made them stick? To understand *how* youth reputations operated in BRC, I employ the concepts and analytic tools described in my theoretical framework: positioning, thickening, and authoring. In this chapter I explain how youth reputations were formed and how youth responded to having a "bad" reputation. I highlight the production of "bad" reputations and youth responses to being positioned as a "bad kid" because it was being categorized as a "bad kid" that had implications for the construction of idle identities.

The Life Cycle of a Reputation

The YPAR team considered several metaphors to represent the process of building a reputation in BRC. Ultimately the group decided developing a reputation was similar to growing a plant. The seed for a reputation is planted every time a young person is associated with an activity, behavior, person or place that has been assigned meaning by residents of BRC. Just because the seed is planted, however, does not ensure the seed will grow. For a reputation to survive, conditions must be favorable: information needs to be publicly known and must be reinforced over time.

Growing a plant is a useful metaphor for understanding how reputations developed in BRC because it implies that youth are unable to grow a reputation unless the surroundings nurture the process. The metaphor indicates that becoming a "good kid" or "bad kid" was not contingent upon youth actions alone but was, instead, an interaction between a young person and her environment. One thing that is problematic about the metaphor, however, is that it makes the process seem linear. In reality, the life cycle was more iterative with each element—youth being

positioned, reputations thickened, and youth authoring—occurring simultaneously. In the

sections that follow, I briefly review the meaning of the elements of the cycle and present data to

illustrate how youth reputations started and how they were cultivated in BRC. Although I write

about each one as distinct for the purpose of explanation, it is important to keep in mind that

these processes often co-occurred. For example, after a young person was initially positioned as

"good kid" or "bad kid" instances of positioning could be categorized as thickening, incidences

of thickening could be viewed as positioning events, and authoring could act to position youth.

Planting The Seed: Positioning Youth

Planting the seed for a reputation is analogous to the concept of positioning because both

mark a beginning point in a cycle. According to Wortham (2004), positioning occurs each time

an individual is called to occupy a particular role or identity that has been given meaning in the

social world. This process takes place quickly over seconds, minutes, or hours; is dependent on

both individual and social processes occurring simultaneously; and is context specific. In this

section, I show how being positioned as a "good kid" or "bad kid" was influenced by youth's

participation in specific activities and by talk amongst community members about young people.

I also discuss how reputations were rooted in a young person's social address, as well as her

connections to places in BRC.

Activities. Data suggested youth positioned themselves and were positioned by others

based upon their participation in a variety of activities. While some youth agreed with how these

determinations were made, others did not. But regardless of whether or not teenagers were in

agreement with the framework, survey responses indicated they understood how it was applied in

their community. This was evidenced by responses to question two of the survey administered by

the YPAR team, which asked, "How do you think you received your reputation? Is it deserved?"

Sixty percent of youth surveyed said "yes." Their responses included statements such as, "My

reputation is deserved, I received my reputation by learning to work hard from an early age," "I do drugs and fight, yes," and "Yes, because I partake in athletics." These youth demonstrated an awareness of the criteria used to classify youth in BRC and drew on accepted models of identity in the community to make sense of their own actions. Twenty-three percent of youth, however, said "no" their reputation was not deserved, and 17% replied with "maybe." A careful examination of the short-answers in these two categories revealed youth questioned whether or not their reputation was deserved either because they disagreed with the criteria used to define a particular reputation or because they believed an individual's reputation should not be contingent upon one type of behavior. For example, one teen wrote, " I feel that part of my reputation is deserved but part is completely based off of bias," while another wrote, "Just because I smoke weed does not make me a bad kid, but that's what everybody thinks."

Other data sources show that many youth acknowledged having participated in an activity perceived as "bad" but argued against being positioned as a "bad kid" because adults participated in these activities without being cast as a negative member of the community and often without harsh penalties. In a focus group one youth explained, "It seems like if a teenager smoked pot like an adult, the teenager would like get into more trouble just because. Even though it is illegal for both people." During the summer, there was an incident with a coach at one of the high schools, which generated a lot of discussion about inconsistencies between the treatment of youth and adults. Late one night, Mr. Mann's car was found abandoned in the river. It was suspected he had driven into the water and was swept downstream; this triggered a multi-hour land and swift-water search. The story that circulated around town was that Mr. Mann had attended "disco night," got drunk, and drove his car into the river. The next day Mr. Mann was found unharmed and no citations were issued. The day after this event occurred, youth researchers discussed what happened at a coffee shop. Sarah said,

You know you see him in school saying don't drink or do drugs and then you hear about this. Him out there getting so drunk he almost kills himself and his dog and lots of people have to spend time looking for him. If that was one of us [teenagers], you know there would be consequences.

Youth viewed this incident (and others like it) as evidence that certain activities should not warrant "bad kid" status because adults were free to engage in the same activities without serious consequences. They disagreed with the value and meaning assigned to activities in their community and how the good/bad framework was applied exclusively to youth.

Adults also expressed concern about the way youth were categorized based on their participation in certain activities; and reported they thought adult expectations for youth behavior were often unreasonable. They worried adults were sending "mixed-messages" to youth. Erica, an adult said,

I think we have higher expectations of kids than sometimes we have of ourselves. I just feel like the regiment is if you do this, you mess up. If you don't do it, you have to do this and if you don't do it, you mess up and boom you're in trouble. Zero tolerance. Like whereas we [adults] mess up all the time. Like if I were to mess up my director would not be like, "you're gone." "You're fired." I couldn't imagine. Or imagine you're suspended from a day of work because you were 10 minutes [late]. It's like a lose-lose situation and I think adults can, in this community, set kids up in a lose situation so they lose no matter what.

According to Erica, the practice of holding youth accountable to standards adults are not expected to meet created a double standard and set young people up for failure.

Participants described inconsistent or "selective" enforcement of rules in different parts of the county as another reason why specific activities should not determine a young person's

reputation. For example, in some areas, specific activities (e.g. smoking tobacco, graffiti, and alcohol consumption) were not tolerated, but in other parts of the county these activities did not result in negative consequences. Caleb, a youth researcher, explained, "In some places, some cops say it's okay but in others, some cops get you for it. They are really bad about selective enforcement and really try to nail teens." Other examples of contradictions that caused concern for youth were parties where alcohol was provided for youth under adult supervision. Youth said being associated with these parties, despite being sanctioned by adults, could result in a young person developing a "bad" reputation. Teenagers described these inconsistencies as frustrating or confusing and they objected to adults arbitrarily deciding how and when laws, rules or policies were enforced.

Youth also reported activities that resulted in youth being categorized as "good kids." The topic first surfaced while the YPAR team was analyzing survey data. One youth researcher remarked, "of course, if you smoke a bunch of weed you're gonna get a bad reputation" but others retorted, "that's not true" and started giving examples of how some youth were able to engage in certain behaviors without experiencing negative consequences because of their participation in specific activities. To demonstrate their point, several youth researchers collectively told a story about how teens from a church youth group were raising money for a church-related event they were planning by charging a small fee for access to marijuana—they called it "Bong hits for Jesus." In the story told by youth, "everyone" knew this was going on, but because the teens were part of a church group, they were somehow protected from "getting in trouble" for this behavior.

This story stood out; and not because it was true or untrue, which I never found out. It stood out because it suggested youth researchers believed engagement in specific activities

offered protection or acted as a buffer against certain types of reputations. When I investigated

this idea further, I found other youth and adults agreed. An adult explained,

> Interviewer: Are there activities that can protect youth from developing a "bad"
> reputation?
>
> McKinley: Yah, probably. I mean if a kid is involved in you know a lot of the
> churches here and does mission trips. I know our church has youth
> mission trips. He could be a kid who smokes dope every day but he is
> probably considered a "good kid" and in some sense he is because he's
> doing something for other people.

In this next excerpt, a young person who described himself as having a "good" reputation

described his experience,

> I can give you my own personal experience as a teenager. If you get good grades and you
> participate in school and do things, you know athletics and all these other things and
> you're out there partying your ass off with the "bad kids" you're not a "bad kid" because
> you're situationally a "good kid" when it counts. Your bad-kiddedness, or whatever, is
> overlooked [by adults] because of that other facet in your life.

Activities that offered protection against being positioned as a "bad kid" were activities that were

highly valued by the community such as community service, employment, being on an athletic

team, outdoor recreation (biking, rock climbing, etc.) and attending church. Youth who

participated in these activities confirmed that they received leniency for "bad" behaviors such as

forgetting homework, drinking at parties, and breaking curfew, whereas teens not engaged in

these activities experienced negative consequences.

According to youth, however, it was not only participation in the activities that mattered,

as the teen in the last excerpt alluded to, it was equally important for youth to know which

situations matter most to adults and make it a point to show effort in those domains. In a focus group with youth who had "good" reputations, the group discussed how to navigate this process and revealed their theory about what it takes to be a "good kid:"

Youth 1:   You're performing when it counts.

Youth 2:   Yah.

Youth 3:   Yah, it's, it's selective.

Youth 4   The situation is a key word there.

Youth 3:   It's a selective being "bad" so that,

Youth 2:   It might be an awareness,

Youth 4:   It might be an awareness that I need to perform, I have to put on my "good kid" act when it's important, when it counts.

Youth 3:   Um-hmm, expectations.

Youth 4:   And some kids have that, that awareness and others don't,

Interviewer: Um-hmm

Youth 4:   And so they, you know they don't perform, you know they don't jump through the hoops for the adults in their lives. And so then they're labeled as a "bad kid," whereas the kids that are jumping through the hoops at the right times can do the same things but, oh no, that's a "good kid." That's my own experience growing up.

Throughout the study "good kids" admitted to participating in "bad" activities but as they suggested, as long as they continued to satisfy adult expectations they could count on being positioned (or positioning themselves) as a "good kid," a status that afforded privileges:

Yeah, I mean I turn assignments in late, I know I can still get full credit on it. But someone who uses [drugs] the teacher thinks, uh-uh what were you doing instead of your

math homework. And they don't give them full credit. I see teachers write off students like that all the time. I heard one teacher tell a student, "You know what, you don't have to pay attention in this class anymore because you are going to fail, no matter what."

When youth with "good" reputations were asked to share their thoughts about this process, they said they knew it was "biased" but that it "worked to their advantage." One youth explained,

I mean you feel bad for those other kids, because you know, well you know it's not fair, that you're getting special treatment. But you're not going to bring it up either. I mean, your, it's like, I am glad it's not me.

Youth went on to say once you're considered a "good kid" it's almost impossible to lose the distinction. Adult participants agreed this dynamic between youth and adults existed and added the perspectives that the youth who make adults feel competent, well liked, and successful are often the ones protected from being categorized as a "bad kid," despite their participation in "bad" activities.

Community talk. Participants identified talk about youth amongst community members as another way youth were positioned in BRC. This consisted of someone observing a young person engaged in an activity such as watching a teenager smoke a cigarette in the park or reading to children at the library and then talking about it to others. If this information was discussed in 3 different conversations, in various contexts, it could act to position youth three times. Community talk was facilitated by living in BRC—a place where it is easy to see people in public spaces and information travels fast because there are fewer degrees of separation between people. In his interview, Mateo captured this process in this excerpt:

Interviewer: So how do people know your reputation?

Mateo: Everybody, somehow or another knows someone, or like their friend knows that lady, who knows my mom, who's best friends with Jerry's

sister, who knows my teacher, who cooks with my grandma, you know that's how it is.

In this next excerpt youth explained how community talk could lead to a "bad" reputation:

Interviewer: What are some ways a reputation gets started?

Youth 1: Well I think that, you know sometimes it's not as bad as some people hear. It's just that one person says something to someone else, that person tells somebody and then the story gets misconstrued,

Youth 2: Through so many people telling it, you know.

Interviewer: Yah.

Youth 1: Like it goes through the grapevine and then, you know gossip and rumors people take the worst of everything.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Youth 3: You know like I saw so and so drinking, but what really could have happened was this person was picking up a friend who had been drinking, you know you never really know, sometimes the whole story could get lost or misinterpreted.

Youth 2: Yah.

Youth 3: And I think that the wrong things are pretty much the same as like anywhere else you would go. It's the drinking and the sleeping around…

Interviewer: Um-hmm.

Youth 1: And like the drugs and pretty much I feel like no matter where you go in America it's kind of like the same basic things that start rumors.

Youth 3: Yah, it's just like in a small town when those,

Youth 2:   Everybody knows it.

Youth 3:   Everybody knows.

Youth 1:   Everybody knows so it turns more [people] against you than somewhere

where it's bigger I guess.

In this excerpt, teens recognized information in the public realm was sometimes inaccurate or

incomplete and although they mentioned gossip (and agreed gossip occurred in BRC), they

distinguished community talk from gossip because they said this talk was not intentionally

malicious. Community talk, instead, referred to how information about youth was transmitted

throughout the community and how it served to position teenagers in narratives. Participants

speculated that in places with larger populations this kind of talk would probably be less

meaningful because there is greater anonymity. Also, they thought it would be less likely people

would be in agreement about what constitutes a "good" or "bad" reputation.

When I asked youth about their role in publicizing information about young people, they

acknowledged that they talked about their peers and said it informed the development of a

reputation. But, they maintained, adults were equally if not more responsible. This was because

adults had access to meaningful information and held more authority in the community than

youth, which gave credibility to the information being shared, even when it was incorrect. I

discuss the role of adult discourse in how youth were positioned later in the chapter.

Social address. Another way youth were positioned in BRC had little to do with

participation in activities or talk but was instead, the result of being located through their

relationships with other people such as siblings, parents or peers. This perspective was first

reflected in answers to the survey question, "How do you think you received your reputation? Is

it deserved?" to which youth responded, "Yes, I have good parents," "I chose the wrong friends,"

and "Yes, a lot of people know my mom."

In interviews and focus groups participants discussed how being related to family members with a particular reputation can position a young person. As Marcus, an adult, put it, "You know families get a reputation of, well that's a good family, that's not a good family, that's a good family" and that gets passed on to young people. Kat, a youth researcher elaborated,

Like it is kind of shocking, I know, but I think your family has so much impact on you because you are related to the whole town if you were born here. And it's just, it has so much to do with you. If you have the same name as someone it's like you're associated with them. Like, you say a last name here and I think "alcoholic" and so does half the town.

Youth who had "bad" reputations reported feeling condemned based on the actions of others. For example, some felt stigmatized by teachers because their siblings did not succeed academically or because they were known for being disruptive at school. Others reported feeling discriminated against because they had family members who had been arrested or had a history of substance abuse. One teenager who described himself as having a "bad" reputation described his experience:

Interviewer: Has your family's reputation ever affected you?

Youth: Yah, just because one family member was a party-er, they automatically think that I am a party-er and I make the same mistakes they did and I am going to screw up worse than they did. People just look down on me and don't ever give me a chance.

Similarly, young people with "good" reputations often credited their family for the way they were viewed in the community. One teen told me, "I think that my family has protected me a lot from having a bad reputation." These teenagers expressed feeling motivated to "live up" to expectations and pressure to excel in school because their older siblings were "gifted." They

conveyed it was important to maintain a positive reputation because they did not want to damage their parents' standing in the community. Youth said they were protected from developing a negative reputation because their parents were either well known, or occupied "positions of stature" which referred to adults in official positions such as teachers, judges, and police officers. These youth also reported receiving clemency or "the benefit of the doubt" from adults when they participated in "bad" activities.

Being positioned on account of one's family and friends created a dilemma for youth who were in relationships with people who had "bad" reputations. While youth knew the relationships damaged their reputations, they were not willing to sever ties to people they loved and, in some cases, it was not possible because you can't choose your family. In addition, youth were unconvinced the actions of their loved ones justified abandoning their relationships:

> I have a friend who tweaks [uses methamphetamine] right now. I still love this guy man. Like I know he tweaks but he ain't ever done me wrong. I've heard him doing other people wrong but he ain't ever done me wrong. And I'm not going to take other people's words you know and not trust this kid anymore. Just because somebody is a tweak doesn't mean they're a bad person.

This teenager went on to explain if he were to abandon his friend it would further compromise the friend's situation, "Right now, he needs people to look after him." This young person's comments showed he was reluctant to accept the models of identity being promoted in the community about youth who use methamphetamine and was unwilling to allow these models guide his interactions with his friend.

Connections to places. A fourth way youth were positioned in BRC was based on their interaction with places and spaces located in BRC. These places included parks, open spaces, and locations where programs to support at risk youth were offered in the community. For

example, the conversation I had with this teenager was typical of how most participants talked about the alternative school, which accepted students who were no longer willing or able to attend traditional high schools in the area:

Interviewer: How do you get a reputation in BRC?

Youth: Like good reputations, you know like playing football, good grades and all that. And with bad reputations, there are quite a few ways, actually. One is definitely going to the alternative school.

Interviewer: How do you get a reputation by being a student there?

Youth: Like a lot of people don't like it you'd be surprised just go around and ask people. Its just taboo like, these are rebellious kids and they are trying to teach them,

Interviewer: Do you feel rebellious?

Youth: No, not really.

Adult members of the community corroborated this perspective. Harry, an adult, described to me a conversation he had with owners of a local business as he tried to arrange internship opportunities for teens from the alternative school:

I would steer kids in their direction and they would call me and say, "Don't send me your broken, crappy kids." And I'm like, they're not, I am not sending you broken, crappy kids, these kids will work harder than you will. And he said, "No they're not, they're all criminals, they're all losers. They go to that loser kid school."

Disparaging talk about other social services available to youth such as counseling or prevention programs and classes were also common in these data. Youth reported that being seen at buildings where support services or classes were offered could result in being positioned as a "bad kid." As one teen remarked, "There's no hiding it. Once someone sees a kid here, they

know you've been in trouble with the law." These data reflect the perspective that "bad" reputations were not solely attached to individuals but were also carried by social groups and institutions in the community.

Public spaces consistently associated with "bad kids" in BRC included under developed areas located in or close to towns. Two areas that were talked about frequently by participants were "Burnout Park" and an open lot near the river. Both spaces had one or two dilapidated places to sit (bench or picnic table) and did not have bathroom facilities or trash receptacles. This was a stark contrast to other parks and areas adjacent to the river, which had facilities, picnic tables, river rocks arranged as seating areas, and interpretive signs explaining the geological formations and features of the river.

These were spaces I heard adults describe as where "all the bad stuff happens." But youth who frequented these spaces argued that the kinds of "bad" activities that occurred in these spaces were limited to smoking cigarettes because both areas are located in the centers of town where "everyone can see you" and according to Tony, "cops are always driving past making sure we're not causing trouble." When I asked youth why they frequented places they knew would affect their reputation, many said these spaces were the only places in BRC where they were allowed to convene or felt welcome. As one youth said, "They're the only places we can go …like honestly anywhere else, people [adults] will make us leave." Youth and adult narratives about these spaces indicated youth reputations were mediated by youth's connections to physical locations in BRC.

Data presented in this section illustrated how the seed was planted or how youth were positioned or positioned themselves as "good kids" and "bad kids" in BRC. I showed how youth and adults made sense of youth interactions with the social and physical world by assigning

meaning and value to activities, people and places. In the next section, I discuss how youth reputations were cultivated after the initial seed was planted.

Cultivating A Reputation: Thickening Identities

The cultivation of a reputation implies a process that promotes growth and makes a reputation robust. This process is similar to the concept of thickening employed by sociocultural theorists who study identity formation. Thickening is a term that describes what happens to an identity when an individual is consistently positioned as a particular kind of person. It portrays what happens to an identity as it is stabilized over time and across contexts (Holland and Lave, 2001). In this section, I describe how youth reputations were thickened in BRC. Specifically, I focus on the social practices of adults, the policies and procedures employed by educational and social service agencies, and how these influenced youth's trajectories of participation.

Social practices of adults. Analyses revealed adult discourse in BRC about teenagers functioned to thicken youth reputations. While youth and adult participants agreed exchanging information about youth was necessary, many objected to the kinds of discourse adults engaged in because, they asserted that it reinforced perceptions of youth that were damaging. As Clara, an adult said in her interview, "It is not that we talk about youth, it's *how* we talk about them that matters." In these data, participants distinguished between two kinds of adult talk that were problematic: official talk and unofficial talk.

Official talk. Official talk was described as talk about youth that occurred while adults were fulfilling official roles in professional spaces, for example, a teacher at school or a judge at a probation hearing. Within official talk, participants identified two practices they said were harmful to youth: labeling and the unnecessary sharing of personal information.

Labels. A common practice within official talk was the use of labels. Labels are words or phrases adults use to convey information about every aspect of a young person's life and are

ubiquitous in education and social service professional communities (Hudak, 2001). Some labels are assigned to youth based upon a formal diagnosis from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); others although not formal, become legitimized by their frequent use by professionals in the field. An adult explained what she noticed about the language being used to describe youth:

Interviewer: Okay, you talked earlier about this idea of labels, how often are labels used? Who uses these labels?

Erica: People, adults. I think people of power. People like police officers, district attorneys, teachers. I mean any people of power who feel justified in giving that name because they were witness to one event.

Interviewer: What are the labels that you hear most often in your daily life?

Erica: Pothead, mess up, screw up, they're not going anywhere. Or people will say well, we know they're not looking past high school. They probably won't pass high school. Just comments that are said like that very often.

Adults in this study expressed feeling frustrated and uncomfortable at meetings or in communication with their colleagues because of the kinds of labels or language used to describe youth. Some conveyed that they felt unable or unwilling to object to the language because doing so might result in negative consequences for them at work or in the community. But one adult, Maneesh, described how he reacted when he heard teachers label youth:

Interviewer: You said earlier that you thought sometimes talk can harm kids,

Maneesh: Uh huh.

Interviewer: Have you ever seen that happen?

Maneesh: Yeah one thing that really bothers me is talk about a student when they're defined as lazy. I always, I shoot back; I feel my emotions rising on that one. What do you mean lazy? Tell me what you mean by lazy?

Interviewer: Have you heard that term a lot?

Maneesh: I have.

In one school, the use of labels had become so contentious that school personnel started to develop standards about language considered permissible to describe youth in meetings and other conversations that take place in the building. For example, the word "lazy" was no longer acceptable in official conversations about students. Personnel have agreed to challenge the use of this term and to encourage one another to describe student actions rather than assign a label.

Unnecessary sharing of personal information. Another aspect of official talk identified as influencing a youth's reputation was the unnecessary sharing of personal information. This was described as situations in which adults communicated details about a youth's life that, in the moment, were not warranted or solicited. For example, one adult, described her observation of a teacher discussing a female student with students in a classroom,

Moira: One girl got arrested last year and one teacher was just going on and on about it, "yah, she got arrested, you know she was at a party" and then everybody knows.

Interviewer: Who was the teacher going on and on to?

Moira: Students in her class.

Interviewer: So, a regular conversation?

Moira: Yah, they were taking attendance, and she said, "Oh so and so is not here" and "Oh yah, she got arrested last night, she was at a party and the cops came."

Moira went on to explain that this teacher probably thought everyone in the classroom already knew because most of the students were at the party, but Moira said, "there is something about a teacher sharing personal details of this girl's life that just felt wrong."

Other examples included sharing personal information in places where adequate levels of privacy could not be guaranteed, such as in offices with open doors or in the hallways. Kat remarked, "If you want to find out what's going on with students, just sit next to two teachers at a football game." Throughout the study, teachers were consistently identified as adults who were particularly effective at sharing information with fellow teachers, school personnel, and other youth. Participants agreed this was problematic because teachers have access to information that can influence future opportunities for youth such as grades, and personal and family histories.

Unofficial talk. Unofficial talk about youth was described as conversations that took place between adults, when they were "off duty" and not acting to fulfill an official role (e.g. teacher, therapist, police officer), in unofficial spaces such as the park, at a BBQ, or in the grocery store. In this talk, adults discussed teenagers they knew through work or observed in the community. They also shared information about their own teenage children and talked about their teenagers' friends. For example, at a BBQ a parent told me about her teenage daughter who had recently been accepted into a leadership camp and a dad joked about how his teenage son and his friends had come home drunk from a party. I interpreted these conversations as adults sharing information about their days with friends and family and conversing about current events that took place in the community. But according to participants, these conversations unintentionally communicated information that reinforced youth reputations.

While I was in BRC, I observed countless conversations in which information about youth was transferred through unofficial talk amongst adults. Most of the conversations I observed did not appear to be intentionally malicious toward youth and rarely included

information typically thought of as confidential such as a clinical diagnosis, academic grades, or the details of a therapy session. (I found most adults who had been trained in professional standards generally kept these details confidential in unofficial spaces) Unofficial talk was significant, however because it was through this kind of talk that adults shared information about youth across contexts. For example, when I started recruiting youth for the YPAR team, adults who knew about the project talked to me in unofficial spaces such as a coffee shop, a restaurant, and at a BBQ, and shared their perspectives about potential youth candidates. I heard comments such as:

> I have known _____ for years and he has always been a creative kid.
>
> _____ will drag the others down.
>
> _____ will be a great asset because he knows everyone in the valley.
>
> _____ has had a lot of family issues.

These comments were based on experiences adults had with youth at school, work, or from personal relationships. This information shaped my perceptions of the young people in the context of the YPAR project. At the time, I knew little about the youth named by these adults, which made the sharing of this information more like a positioning event, as it introduced me to some of the prevalent storylines about the youth in the community. But had I held a pre-existing story about these young people based on previous experiences, the transfer of this information could have acted to reinforce a particular image of the youth. It could have thickened a reputation. Later that summer, when I heard adults talk about youth I had met through the YPAR project their comments held more meaning. By October, I realized the significance of a phrase frequently used amongst youth and educators at one of the alternative schools: "Be bigger than your story." At first I had understood the saying to mean don't let your past dictate your future. But Mateo provided a different interpretation. He said,

Yeah, let them, let them say how you are, everybody watching you here and there and talking about you. Like we know who you are. But I can, like _____ always says, I can get bigger than my story… I can do something different.

Mateo's interpretation of the phrase implied that he could act in ways that were inconsistent with the story being told about him in a variety of contexts throughout the community. I also found it interesting that when youth and adults used this phrase they seemed to imply that a young person's story had been completed, instead of a work in progress.

In addition to thickening a young person's reputation, unofficial talk was problematic for youth for several other reasons. First, when adults talked about youth to one another in unofficial spaces they were unable to control who had access to the information. Second, adults shared information youth would not choose to communicate to adult members of the community for example, when a mom talks to her friends and tells them about a party her son is attending over the weekend or when teachers' speculate about the personal lives of students. Third, adults did not anticipate how other adults utilized information nor did they consider the consequences for teenagers. This was exemplified in a story an adult relayed to me about how urinalyses (UA's) were scheduled for youth on probation. The narrative conveyed that some adults associated with the juvenile justice system gathered information about when youth were having a party, then issued UA's on the day after. This story demonstrated the point that just because adults were not wearing their "professional hat" in the moment a conversation occurred, did not mean the information would not be utilized at another time.

Social practices of adults reinforced youth reputations by transferring information about youth across multiple contexts in the community. This sharing of information acted to position and reposition teens as a particular kind of young person in different domains of the young person's life until the adult community held a common perception of the teenager—until a

reputation was thick. Or as one adult put it, "until his identity is cemented by the adult community." In the next section, I describe how organizational practices employed by educational and social service agencies acted to thicken youth reputations and how these practices influenced trajectories of participation.

Eligibility requirements for target populations. Using risk and protective factors to determine eligibility for programs was a practice commonly used by schools and community organizations in BRC. For example, to qualify for extracurricular activities such as an athletic team or leadership council, a teenager must earn a specific grade point average or demonstrate a positive social orientation; to enroll in drug awareness class or be invited to a CYS sponsored activity, youth must have poor academic performance or be using ATODs.

Grouping youth in this way had its advantages. It encouraged young people to develop friendships and support networks with teens who had similar interests and life experiences; and it allowed educators and counselors to focus on the needs of a specific group of youth. Although youth expressed appreciation for being with "kids like me," cherished the relationships they developed with peers and caring adults, and learned skills relevant to their lives, they also recognized several dilemmas created by this practice. First, it segregated youth and made socializing with a variety of teenagers difficult. A teen with a "good" reputation explained,

> Yeah, I mean, the adults are the ones separating us all the time. We, I mean there are only so many kids to hang out with here, so at one time or another everyone is friends with everyone. If you keep seeing the same kids everywhere those are the ones you're going to be friends with.

For youth with "good" reputations this meant increasing their social capital in the community. But for youth identified as "at risk" this meant developing connections with peers who were

viewed by the community as having a "bad" reputation. Tony, expressed his frustration with this dilemma,

> I always hear don't hang out with so and so or don't hang out with the kids who, who are doing "bad" stuff. But, I'm like, those are the kids in my classes, the ones I see at CYS. Who am I supposed to be friends with?

The practice of segregating youth made it difficult for "bad kids" to create social networks with peers who were valued by the community.

The second dilemma it created was to stigmatize youth who were actively seeking help or support. The more a young person took advantage of services designed to increase academic performance or prevent dropping out, substance abuse, and other high risk behaviors, the more people talked about her as being a particular kind of person and the more she became associated with having a "bad" reputation. This made it unlikely for her to be considered for opportunities associated with having a "good" reputation, which made it difficult to alter her reputational status in the community. Adults corroborated this perspective:

> We [adults] don't take people at their value we take them at their preconceived value. And that's very hard to change. I talk about the halo effect with students, which I've described to them as you create an image for yourself and everything can be interpreted through that. That can work to your advantage or to your disadvantage. You could be a B student that turns in papers and a teacher thinks you're great and they give you the benefit of a doubt. Or you can go the other way and they can see you negatively. So anything you do no matter how good, they're going to interpret it negatively or at least not as positive as it could be.

This excerpt from Maneesh highlights two important aspects of how reputations were viewed in the community. First, it hints at how difficult it was for youth to change the way they were

viewed by adults once they have developed a reputation. Second, when Maneesh says, "you create an image for yourself" it suggests how adults, even the ones most supportive of youth with negative reputations, attributed youth reputations to the actions of youth alone. In this conversation, Maneesh does not recognize the role of adults in this process.

Using risk and protective factors to sort youth into programs and services was problematic because it routed teenagers to spend time with people at places associated with a "good" or "bad" reputation, which reinforced the way a young person was perceived in the community. For some youth this translated into increased opportunities for employment, leadership, team sports, and civic engagement. The more activities they were involved in, the more they cemented their "good" reputation. But for youth identified as "at risk" it created a cycle that thickened their "bad" reputation, narrowed choices, and limited possibilities. Youth were directed to participate in activities that would reinforce their reputation as a "bad kid" and were increasingly shut out from participation in the kinds of activities that could alter their reputation in the community. Living in a place with a small population and few programs and resources for youth exacerbated this situation because once youth became known as a "bad kid" there were few places they could go to reinvent themselves.

Social marketing campaigns. Another practice that I argue thickened youth reputations was the use of social marketing campaigns. Social marketing is the application of marketing concepts and techniques to "sell" attitudes, behaviors, and ideas to influence social behaviors for the welfare of individuals and to benefit society. According to Kotler & Lee (2008) "the most challenging aspect of social marketing (also its greatest contribution) is that it relies heavily on "rewarding good behaviors" rather than punishing "bad ones" through legal, economic, or coercive forms of influence" (p.8). Examples of popular national campaigns have included the

"Take a Bite Out of Crime" focused on increasing general awareness about public safety and "Rock the Vote" intended to increase voting amongst young adults.

In ATOD prevention, social marketing seeks to promote healthy choices and encourage individuals to resist making decisions that could compromise their health and well being. In BRC two social marketing campaigns appeared to influence community perceptions of youth. One campaign, sponsored at the county level, included a series of advertisements in local publications. A typical advertisement started by posing the question, "Did you know?" then listed facts and statistics about youth substance use in BRC. For example, "5 out of 6 Mariposa High School students never drink and drive." Often, the advertisement ended with the statement, "Now You Know" and promoted the message "BRC has what it takes to end substance abuse." The other was a statewide campaign sponsored by the Colorado Meth Project. According to the website, the goal is to "arm teens and young adults across the state with the facts about methamphetamine use so that they can make well informed decisions when presented with the opportunity to try it" (Colorado Meth Project, 2011). This campaign uses graphic images of teenagers becoming vicious, untrustworthy, sexually promiscuous, and physically disfigured to show the life-changing effects of methamphetamine use. Advertisements created by the Meth Project are prevalent in Colorado and can be seen on television, heard on the radio, and appear on billboards that flank roadways around the state. They are particularly noticeable in rural areas.

While these campaigns are different in that one highlights positive behaviors (5 out of 6 students don't drink and drive) while the other portrays harmful behaviors, they both define and place value on youth behaviors. These campaigns provide "a public model of identity," that community members (youth included) referenced to make sense of youth actions (Wortham, 2004, p. 167).

Youth frequently reported being ostracized on account of using alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco. But it was particularly evident when talking to youth who had experiences with methamphetamine use. These youth described the deleterious effects the drug had on their physical health and appearance, but explained the psychological effects of being ostracized by their community were equally difficult to endure and exacerbated the situation. Youth reported being shunned by family and friends, asked to leave commercial businesses, and turned away from support services. "It was brutal. I mean no one would talk to me, no one wanted to help me. Even after I got clean, I still, I couldn't make 'em see, I was still me." One youth described receiving harsh treatment from members of the community after one of his family members was involved in a meth related incident. "People would just come up to me and say the worst things about me being a tweaker, and how I had no morals and shit. I was like, that wasn't even me."

While I do not have data that provides a direct linkage between the ads and how youth who used methamphetamine were ostracized, I argue that these kinds of campaigns contributed to a public discourse about the use of substances and chemical addiction and shaped categories of social identity that were available to youth. The campaigns demonize certain behaviors to such an extent that it was difficult for youth to reestablish themselves as positive members of the community, even after they have stopped engaging in these behaviors. Social marketing campaigns that advertised behaviors related to ATOD were resources community members drew from to establish the dominant categories of youth: "good kids" and "bad kids."

Authoring: Youth Respond to Being Positioned as a "Bad Kid

According to Holland, et al. (1998) once individuals are positioned (by self or others) in a particular role or identity, they must "answer" to being positioned in what is referred to as the "space of authoring" (p.169). This space is formed both within and outside of individuals and includes action and speech. Authoring does not unfold in predetermined ways. Instead, it may

include variations and improvisations and may occur in a single event or include multiple events, in different contexts, over time. In this section, I discuss three ways youth responded to being positioned as a "bad kid" in BRC. Often a youth's response was simultaneously an instance of self-positioning and acted to thicken a young person's reputation.

"Live up to it." A common response to being viewed in a negative way by the community was for youth to "live up" to his or her reputation. One adult told me during her interview,

I had a girl yesterday and we were talking… I was like so what's going on for you that you can't stay sober? What's happening? She's like, "I have a reputation and I have to live up to that." When I asked her what is her reputation? She said, "a party-er."

Living up to a reputation meant youth embraced how they were viewed by others and chose to behave in ways consistent with the reputation or label. In other words, teenagers relied upon the messages they received from external sources to determine their future behaviors. Kat explained,

See my way of thinking, from my own experience is you see yourself in a certain way because you get attention for that way and you live up to that. And that's what I did.

Other youth, however, invoked attributes associated with their reputation to justify behavior and assert themselves in situations in which they felt disparaged or powerless:

You know, I've been labeled like this so I go with it. Sometimes I feel like, you know you call me a bad kid, well I'll show you how bad I can be.

During an observation at a CYS program, I listened to two youth discuss an incident that occurred over the weekend. Several youth were "hanging out" at the park after dark when they realized they were being observed by police. One teen had suggested leaving the park so they did not "get in trouble" but another reported wanting to stay and engage with the officer. He said,

> When the cops are always checking me out, watching if I will mess up, it makes me feel
>
> like acting like a jerk. As long as I am going to get in trouble, it may as well be for
>
> something I actually do.

In this excerpt, the teen indicated that he expected a confrontation with police and rather than wait for the officer to initiate, he decided to take control of the situation and give the officer a good reason to confront him.

Another reason youth embraced their reputation was because they were concerned about social consequences. Youth described feeling obligated to meet the expectations of a particular reputation because they were worried about losing their friends, as one youth said, "All my friends, well they expect me to be a certain way. I don't want to lose them." They also acted in ways consistent with their reputation because they did not want to be perceived as "fronting" or "fake," which indicated they were trying to be something they weren't. One youth explained,

> You know it's kind of ironic and it makes me want to laugh. Because if you went
>
> from a bad reputation and all of a sudden snapped to a good one, and were doing
>
> great and people noticed, then they'd get in a circle and gossip about how much
>
> you changed. Like, kids would be like, "Oh my God, now she's a goody-good girl, look
>
> at her she used to be a druggie, oh my God, that's crazy."

Although youth described choosing to behave in ways that were in alignment with the way they were perceived in the community, this did not mean that these reputations remained static and unchanging. Youth improvised in ways that were sometimes unexpected. In the following excerpt, a teen provided a detailed example of how he interpreted his reputation at school and intentionally used it to guide his actions when he was angry:

> Like they [adults at school] kept telling me I was "habitually disruptive" and everybody

was pointing their finger at me, which made me angry… So I was like, well I am going to

point some fingers in your face and your not going to like it. I know I am a leader and I

can use it to my advantage. So, I'd be like, I am going to totally take everybody in this

class and lead them in the other direction…I am going to totally throw the other kids out

of whack.

In this excerpt, this youth described how he acted in accordance with the label "habitually

disruptive" but added a dimension. He called upon his leadership abilities to ensure he was

successful at disrupting the class. This showed that reputations were being used to construct new

ways of being.

"Fight it." "Hey I am not a bad kid alright! I come to school every day and I get a check

every week and yah, I frickin' go out and party." Here I describe youth who resisted the call to

occupy the role of "bad kid" in the community. These young people acknowledged being

positioned in a negative way but refused to accept the designation. Some actively tried to alter

their reputation by engaging in the kinds of activities they believed would be perceived as

"good." One youth told me," I know I have a "bad" reputation but it's not going to stop me from

trying to get a good one." When I asked him what he had tried, he replied, "Community service

and get in the newspaper for doing something good."

Other youth who resisted being labeled upheld the belief that just because the community

did not approve of them did not mean they were "bad." These youth refused to be defined by

community standards and held fast to their own code of ethics and moral conduct. They

maintained that an individual should, "just keep doing what you think is right and eventually the

rest of the community will see who you really are." In some instances, youth communicated that

it was impossible for the community to understand how their behavior might be construed as

positive because community members did not understand "what they were going through." For

example, one youth said, "Yeah, I smoke pot but I don't do meth. Pretty much everyone I know has done meth. I've worked really hard not to get caught up in that shit."

Disconnect. A third way youth responded to being positioned as a "bad kid" in BRC was to purposefully disconnect from academic and community life. This meant, for example, choosing not to attend school or church, and passing up opportunities to participate in programs, activities, and services designed to engage and support youth. This response was evidenced by comments such as "Because of the way we are labeled, we don't want to be involved, we know we are not welcome," "There were so many rumors about me when I was going to school…I wanted to dropout so bad," and "I kind of don't go out anymore because I just got sick of cops following me," which were common across these data. These youth described disengagement as a response to avoid feeling judged or criticized. One youth articulated how feeling judged negatively decreased her motivation to attend school:

> When you're judged all the time at school it makes it extremely hard to focus. It makes you lose your complete drive to do good. You just don't care…It makes it hard to go, you skip a lot because you just don't want to deal…and you just don't want to be in school anymore.

Adults expressed the perspective that a young person's unwillingness to interact with any person or place where they might be perceived as a "bad kid" was a sign a teenager had "lost hope" or "given up." One adult said,

> Once youth get caught for not making good choices they start to not believe in themselves, they see that no matter what they do they can't be successful here and start to let go of their visions and dreams. They start to believe they are no good, not worthwhile and resign themselves…They let themselves accept failure.

Although many youth expressed feeling hopeless, analyses revealed there were some youth who held a different perspective. These youth described disengaging from people and places in BRC as a strategy to preserve their dignity and self-esteem: "I feel like everybody is against me and so I take a break. I mean I can only take so much abuse." In an interview, Tony offered his perspective,

> In a small town, everybody knows everybody. If I make a mistake, and do something bad, everybody knows, everybody judges me. Why would I want to be involved in a place where I feel so, so judged?

Tony's response conveyed the perspective that to stay connected to a place where he felt mistreated and was given few opportunities to express his positive attributes would be illogical.

The three responses briefly described above illustrate a variety of ways youth demonstrated agency when summoned to occupy the role of "bad kids." Analyses suggest these responses were not mutually exclusive or confined to a particular context; youth reported experimenting with various responses in multiple contexts.

Repairing Youth Reputations

> Yep, once you have a "bad" reputation it's hard to change it. You're stuck with it no matter what…you can't really change it back. Someone will always remember you for that reputation and look at you that way.

This excerpt, from a youth focus group, reflects a popular sentiment I heard about whether or not it was possible for youth to change a "bad" reputation into a "good" one. This raised the question, was it possible to repair a damaged reputation?

Many youth described the situation in BRC as hopeless because they believed it was impossible to repair their reputation and change their status in the community. Teen mothers and youth who experienced physical consequences related to substance use (such as Hepatitis C or

tooth decay) expressed feeling especially discouraged. These youth expressed little hope about their ability to change their reputation because they believed physical markers of past events encouraged community members to continually "look down" on them. In a focus group, a teenage mother described her experience,

> You know, I got pregnant and had a baby. It wasn't on purpose but here she is and everybody judges me and thinks I am a little slut. I walk into stores with my kid and people treat me like I am a horrible person, they are disgusted with me because I have a kid and I am 17. Yeah, even the teachers judged me. They wouldn't say it to my face but my friends would come around after school and tell me.

Adult participants agreed repairing a damaged reputation in BRC was challenging. In interviews, when asked if they thought a young person could change his "bad" reputation, adults described the process as a "long uphill battle." They said it would be "very, very difficult in a small town" because doing so would require youth to take drastic actions such as "changing their friends" or "disassociating from family." Several remarked the only way they thought a youth could escape a "bad" reputation would be "to leave the county." One adult explained,

> My number one piece of advice to kids with "bad" reputations, what I tell every
> kid [I work with] is get out of this town. Come back in five years if you want, but
> get out now, as soon as you can.

Youth often commented that they too believed the only way to get rid of their reputation was to leave BRC and start anew in another place. Additionally, young women emphasized the importance of leaving BRC because they were concerned their children or future children would be affected negatively by their reputation.

But data suggested that some youth were more optimistic. These young people said, although it would be "extremely hard because you are known as this person," they thought it was

possible to be redeemed in the eyes of community members and restore a "bad" reputation. Angel explained:

Interviewer: Do you think it is possible to change the way the community views you?

Angel: No. Well, actually you can but it just takes quite a while. And it is harder to go from being "bad" to being "good." It's kind of like how you can go from A to an F in a week but to go from an F to an A takes forever and is really hard. You know? That's kind of how it is with reputation.

Sarah reported that she was successful at changing the way she was viewed in BRC. When I asked her to describe how she accomplished this she said,

I love animals, so I volunteer at the humane society all the time. They might think I am "bad" at school but over there they think I am great. I just kept going no matter what people said and now I think, at least amongst some of the leaders in the community, I have a reputation as a responsible, smart young adult because of the things I have gotten myself involved with and done and made the effort to do.

Sarah's story shows how "doing good in one place" gave her the confidence to try out new things and push herself to "stay on course." Participants provided two additional examples of youth who repaired their reputation and were able to establish a positive identity in BRC.

Summary

In this chapter I drew concepts and tools from my theoretical framework to make sense of how youth reputations started and were reinforced in BRC, and how youth responded to having a negative reputation. Data suggested a young person's reputation was shaped by her participation in activities and by her relations to people and places in the community. While teenagers demonstrated an awareness of the process, they critiqued and contested it. Young people objected to their being categorized by criteria they experienced as inconsistent, selective, and

uniformed; and resented being held to standards that adults were not also required to meet. Analyses revealed the behaviors young people engaged in and the choices they made influenced their reputations but that the actions of adults also mattered. Adults contributed to the construction of youth reputations by engaging in social and organizational practices that positioned youth as a particular kind of young person as well as reinforced a teenagers' reputation in the community. This produced positive results for youth who were viewed as "good kids" but had negative consequences for those who were perceived as "bad kids." I also discussed three distinct paths youth traveled once they were positioned as having a "bad" reputation in BRC: living up to it, fighting it, and disconnecting. While many youth and adults felt it was impossible to repair a damaged reputation, others were more optimistic and had ideas about what it might take for a young person to start to change their reputational status. In the next, and final chapter, I discuss how these findings are useful for conceptualizing and studying idle and disconnected youth and for thinking about adolescent identity development.

CHAPTER VIII

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Researchers estimate there are approximately six million youth considered idle in the

United States. While half of these youth will eventually connect to social supports, education or

the labor force, the other half will remain disconnected from society, which significantly

increases their chances of becoming incarcerated, raising children in poverty, becoming

homeless, relying on public assistance, and suffering the effects of violence and substance abuse

(Besharov & Gardiner, 1998). According to a recent study, rural youth are more likely to be idle

than their urban counterparts (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2008). To understand how features of rural

contexts contributed to youth idleness and to long- term disconnection, I first turned to academic

literature. But there is little empirical work about youth growing up rural, and a majority of the

studies that do exist emphasize individual risk factors and behaviors rather than how context

shapes people's trajectories. The goal for this dissertation was to design and implement a study

that would contribute to a better understanding about the lives of rural youth, and specifically to

understand how aspects of place shaped idle pathways. Two research questions guided this

study: How are idle identities constructed in a rural community? What can rural communities do

to prevent idleness?

Discussion of Findings

To answer my research questions, I worked collaboratively with a group of nine youth

co-researchers and carried out surveys, observations, interviews, and focus groups. Youth

researchers argued that reputations were the key mechanisms by which idle identities were

constructed in their community. This was because having a "bad" reputation could limit a young

person's ability and willingness to stay connected to institutions and social networks intended to

support them in navigating a route to productive relationships, healthy behaviors, and

educational or occupational opportunities. Their understanding of how youth reputations were constructed in BRC helped me to understand how being positioned as a "bad kid" could lead to idleness and disconnection.

My examination of how teenagers' reputations were produced in BRC revealed two central and interrelated findings. The first is that adults played a vital role in framing what it meant to be a "bad kid" and were responsible for creating conditions that placed, and kept, youth on pathways to disconnection. Second, specific characteristics of place were relevant and essential to the construction of youth identities because they shaped the social interactions of the inhabitants of BRC and provided resources for making sense of behaviors and activities. In the paragraphs that follow, I synthesize key findings about the lived experience of young people and discuss why these findings mattered to how youth identities were constructed in this rural place.

Constructed Identities: Young People as a Collective

Recent changes in BRC affected youth in important ways. For example, a new identity as a rural idyll or dream location influenced opportunities for teens and shaped community perceptions of youth as a collective or social group. What was once a community with a balanced age distribution has become a community with almost half the population older than 45. The local economy, which used to manufacture products for national consumption, is now built upon the commodification of the physical landscape and satisfying the leisurely pursuits of "outsiders" such as retirees and tourists. In an attempt to make BRC attractive and welcoming to these populations, and to ensure the economic well being of the county, adults made decisions about the allocation of resources and management of public spaces that often conflicted with or were unsupportive of youths' needs and desires. For example, there were few entertainment and recreational options that appealed to or were accessible to the majority of the teenagers in the area; the programs and resources that did exist for youth were not a fiscal priority for a

significant number of residents. In addition, youth were viewed as problematic in many public areas, especially the historic retail and commercial districts.

Many adults interpreted youth presence and behaviors as deterrents to visitors and future residents. These interpretations echoed "fictions of adolescence" or widely circulating discourses in the United States about teenagers (Vadeboncouer, 2005). These discourses cast young people (particularly youth who were considered at risk) as "disruptive," "troublesome," and "dangerous," which contributed to the surveillance and restriction of youth in the public realm. Drawing from these narratives about teenagers also fueled "relationships of mistrust" between youth and adults (Kelly, 2003, p. 165); and made it difficult for young people to develop a sense of connectedness or membership in their own community (Whitlock, 2007). As a result, teenagers felt disempowered, unwelcome, and were relegated to in-between spaces making them virtually invisible as members of the community. It also contributed to young peoples' perceptions that adults were indifferent or unconcerned about their well-being.

A physical divide between youth and adults in the public realm increased negative attitudes between the two groups. The less time and space youth and adults occupied together, the easier it was for each group to problematize the other, which resulted in a community with low social capital between youth and adults (Putnam, 2000). This is important because social capital, or the product of social relationships such as trust and security, plays a pivotal role in the well being and healthy development of youth (Bassani, 2007) The lack of social capital produced negative consequences for all teenagers but was especially problematic for those whose personal histories threatened to disrupt the image of BRC as an ideal location. These findings mirror Kraack and Kenway (2002) and Matthews, et al. (2000), whose results challenged misconceptions of rural areas as being idyllic for youth. They are also consistent with Sancar and

Severcan (2010) whose work showed development and tourism had implications for how people made sense of selves and of others.

Constructed Identities: Youth as Individuals

Broader discourses about adolescents also influenced the construction of individual youth identities. Familiar storylines about teenagers and the behaviors that signal "good" or "bad" youth in these discourses were combined with local attitudes and values (e.g. healthy lifestyles or recreational activities) to create two dominant models of identity available to teenagers: "good kids" and "bad kids." Participants in this study referred to these identities as reputations.

Reputations played a vital role in youth's lives and had a strong influence on their trajectories of participation in academic and community life. A teenager's reputation affected her relationships, the kinds of learning environments she was invited to be a part of in the community, her well being, and orchestrated future actions or behaviors. Similar to MacTavish and Salamon (2006), I found there were clear, yet distinct pathways available to youth in this rural community. "Good kids" were placed on a pathway to success. These youth were granted access to an assortment of opportunities to develop skills and competencies that would help them transition from adolescence to adulthood. They were offered jobs, practiced leadership, and had a variety of chances to develop valued social networks. In addition, they received leniency from adults for behaviors that would result in serious consequences for "bad kids," which helped them maintain their reputational status.

"Bad kids," however, experienced limited choices and few opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge that would be necessary to successfully assume adult roles and responsibilities. These youth were, instead, channeled to participate in programs and services intended to help them to develop skills and knowledge that would prevent negative behaviors. An unintended consequence of involvement with these programs was that participation and

membership with these groups reinforced a young person's reputation as a "bad kid." This created an intractable dilemma for teenagers who needed or wanted support. On one hand these programs and services were useful because they provided opportunities to address obstacles in their lives with the support of peers and caring adults. But on the other hand, attending these programs thickened their reputation as a "bad kid" because youth interacted with people and places associated with having a negative reputation. For youth who were dealing with more than one challenge, such as addiction and low academic achievement, the situation was even worse. The longer youth received services or attended programs, the fewer chances they had to integrate, the harder it became to develop social networks that were valued in the community, and the more they developed a stigma of being a "bad kid." In other words, it became increasingly difficult for these youth to change their reputation in the community.

The practice of dividing youth into categories and using these categories to decide who does and does not have access to learning opportunities in the community was problematic for the reasons I just described. It also had implications for how youth made sense of who they were in relationship to others and their role in the community. Youth responded in three ways to being positioned as a "bad kid." The first response was to "live up to it." This meant youth embraced the label or reputation by choosing to act in accordance with it. The second response was to "fight it," which meant youth refused to be defined by community standards and instead chose to conduct their lives based on their own values and beliefs. The third response was to disconnect. Youth who chose this route purposefully disengaged from contexts they perceived to be damaging as a strategy of self-preservation. Many did so because they felt hopeless and believed there was nothing they could do to change their reputation or situation in BRC. Others, however, disconnected from people and places because staying would be too detrimental to their dignity and self-esteem; they were aware that the programs intended to help were damaging their

reputations. Unfortunately, these responses did not always work to youths' advantage and often further jeopardized their ability to access the support that all young people need to transition successfully into adulthood.

Aspects of Place that Mattered in the Construction of Youth Identities

But a reputation is not an experience unique to BRC as Mayer-Schönberger (2009) reminds us in his discussion of the importance of managing reputations in a digital age. So what was it about BRC that made reputations so potent and salient in the lives of youth? Data suggested the power of reputations was rooted in aspects of place, which included the physical environment as well as the social interactions that occurred in BRC. I have already discussed how recent shifts in the local economy and a new identity for BRC influenced the construction of youth identities but there were other ways that place mattered.

In BRC, people had long histories and their lives frequently intersected which blurred the boundaries between personal and professional lives, and between public and private information, which decreased confidentiality. Most significant, however, was the phenomenon referred to as "everybody knows everybody," which reflected the idea that in a small town it was easy to know and be known by members of the community. This phenomenon, informed by the physical features in BRC, created a lack of anonymity, facilitated the expeditious sharing of information, and set the stage for youth to be labeled or positioned in ways that were not easily undone.

Another way place mattered for youth in BRC was related to the lack of available resources for youth. Living in a place with a fewer programs and opportunities for teens exacerbated having a negative reputation in two important ways. First, fewer programs translated to fewer spaces for youth participation; the opportunities that did exist were usually reserved for youth with "good" reputations. Second, youth could not choose from a variety of schools or programs, which meant there was nowhere they could go where people did not know some part

of their story. This made it difficult for teenagers to reinvent their identities as they had fewer chances to experiment with new ways of being.

Finally, consistent with the findings of Jones (2002), reputations were meaningful and robust in BRC because of the social and organizational practices adults engaged in within the community. For example, adult talk about young people, which included labeling and the unnecessary sharing of youth's personal information, contributed to the development of youth reputations, while using individual risk and protective factors to determine eligibility for programs and opportunities reinforced these reputations. Social marketing campaigns further contributed to the good/bad framework by advertising "good" and "bad" behaviors, which became a resource residents used to make meaning of youth reputations.

The findings I just summarized have implications for scholars who study identity development and disconnected youth, and for educators and prevention professionals working in rural areas. Before I address the implications, however, I discuss several limitations to this study.

Limitations

This dissertation was a qualitative study that examined how youth identities were constructed within a rural community over the course of one year. While it reveals two of the dominant models of identity available to youth and provides examples of how young people came to occupy these roles, my analysis does not fully account for the range of influences on social identity development for youth in this study. To do so, would require a more in-depth examination of additional contexts (e.g. family and peers), over a longer period of time and consideration of additional social, cultural, and psychological factors.

A second limitation of this study was that I intentionally did not systematically collect demographic and background data for youth participants, which limited my ability to make claims about the relation of these factors to youth being positioned in a particular way. For

example, some of these data suggested that youth who were positioned as "bad kids" grew up in poverty, but I was unable to verify this because I did not collect information about youths' socioeconomic status (SES). I aimed, instead, to focus on characteristics of community settings and features of place. If it were the case that SES was intertwined with the kinds of identities and opportunities available to youth, this kind of information would lend an additional layer of understanding to my study.

A third limitation stems from my decision to prioritize youth perspectives. I wanted to see and understand the phenomenon of youth reputations from their point of view. Consistent with this belief, I approached my interactions with youth as opportunities to hear how they used their experiences to make meaning of their place in the community. My intention was not to verify the truthfulness of their claims but rather to identify the stories that circulated among youth and adults and to understand the significance of these stories. While I recognize that all interactions could be analyzed as performances, or opportunities to position the self in particular ways, I chose not to analyze participants' discourse and instead accepted their stories as indicators of their experiences in the community.

Finally, the rural setting where I conducted this study has a unique history, background, and varied features and dimensions, as do all places. Employing a sociocultural approach with a focus on aspects of place that mattered for youth required I paid careful attention to the unique details of this place. While this was useful for the members of BRC, and productive for this specific examination of a rural community, it may limit the relevance of these results to other rural areas. Next, I highlight how findings from this dissertation will make three contributions to scholarly research with a focus on adolescent identity formation and disconnected youth.

Implications for Scholarship

Importance of Place in a Sociocultural Approach to Identity

Scholars who draw on sociocultural theory to understand identity formation

conceptualize identity as "a concept that figuratively combines the intimate or personal world

with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5). To

understand identity development, these scholars focus on practices and activities situated in

intimate, social, and cultural landscapes, in historically specific contexts, and across multiple

timescales to show how individuals take up available resources to construct identities (Wortham,

2004; Jurow, 2005; Urrieta, 2006; Blackburn, 2003). While scholars situated in this tradition

have made significant contributions to understanding how identities are constructed in a variety

of contexts, few have focused on features of place explicitly as part of the process.

For youth growing up in BRC, place shaped identity in a variety ways. These ranged

from the physical aspects of place, such as geological features and natural resources, which

informed the new identity of BRC and the changing economy, to social interactions in a

community where "everybody knows everybody." By attending to place, I came to see how

participants drew social categories of identity out of tensions that existed in BRC and that these

tensions were rooted in historical changes in the county. I came to know the values, beliefs and

attitudes of the residents, which gave meaning to these categories; and found that how youth

negotiated public spaces and the challenges they experienced in these spaces were important to

how youth were positioned and their identities were thickened.

In this study, examining features of places and spaces provided valuable insights about

the layers of complexity present in the construction of youth's identities. Had I not attended to

place I might have reached very different conclusions about why tensions existed between youth

and adults in the public realm and I would have had failed to see some of the most salient

resources residents were using to make sense of youth behaviors and reputations. I would have been missing pieces of the puzzle. The importance of exploring features of place is not limited to studies about youth in rural places. I have also seen the value of developing a thorough understanding of history and places to comprehend the experiences of urban youth (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, in press). I encourage researchers who study identity development to examine features of place and physical landscapes because doing so deepens our understanding of social and cultural worlds.

Re-thinking Pathways to Disconnection

Much of the literature about disconnected youth has focused on identifying youth's behaviors and demographic characteristics that place them at risk of disconnection or that are correlated with disconnection (Wald & Martinez, 2003; Hair, et al., 2005). This body of work has provided a detailed portrait of how many young people disconnect, who they tend to be, and the behaviors and activities in which they are engaged. What it doesn't do, however, is document the ways that disconnection is a social process that unfolds in social interactions in real time. It tends, instead, to locate the problem of disconnection within the individual person.

I have aimed to explore the contextual factors of a rural community that contributed to youth becoming disconnected. I set out to hear youths' perspectives about what made it difficult to imagine and seek productive futures. I learned how a young person was viewed by adults in the community played an important role in whether he remained engaged in academic and community life or whether he disconnected. In BRC the typical approach to dealing with "bad kids" was to ask, "What could she have done differently?" and then provide interventions aimed at changing the behavior. This approach recognizes a young person's agency but it rests on a flawed assumption that a teenager's actions were solely responsible for his reputation. My analyses revealed, however, that much of what started and reinforced reputations in BRC

happened at levels of interaction beyond the control of individual youth and were influenced by the social and organizational practices engaged in by adults. The most explicit examples of these included dividing youth into categories, segregating youth into programs and opportunities by risk and protective factors, using deficit based language to talk about young people, and the unnecessary sharing youth's personal information. These practices created obstacles that made it difficult for youth to access opportunities where they could develop feelings of belonging and connectedness, and relationships with pro-social peers and caring adults, which prior literature has shown to be essential to healthy youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Based on my findings, I argue there is an imbalance in the research with too much emphasis placed on what teenagers do (or do not do) and not enough that explores what adults can do differently to alleviate the conditions that frame youth and their behaviors as problematic and contribute to the social exclusion of teens in our schools and communities.

Youth as Researchers

Scholars have articulated several compelling rationales for working with youth as co-researchers. For example, engaging youth as researchers strengthens the ecological validity of a study, it provides a more accurate understanding of the issue under investigation, promotes youth development, and creates opportunities for youth to tell their own stories (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, in press; Mitra, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2002). In addition, this approach to research repositions youth as experts and producers of knowledge, and challenges negative stereotypes about young people that are pervasive in the United States. Torre and Fine (2005) write,

> Repositioning youth as researchers rather than as the researched shifts the practice of researching *on* youth to *with* youth—a position that stands in sharp contrast to the current neoliberal constructions of youth as dangerous, disengaged, and blind consumers (p.272).

In this study, I found the benefits of collaborating with youth as co-researchers to be consistent with the claims YPAR scholars have documented in previous literature. Working with youth researchers provided an in-depth understanding of what it was like to grow up rural. It created opportunities for youth to tell their own stories about having a "bad" reputation. It positioned at risk youth as experts and resources, rather than problems, in BRC. And it shifted the way some adults in the community perceived youth with "bad" reputations. For example, after hearing one of the YPAR presentations to county officials, an adult remarked,

> I know "good kids" are concerned about their reputation. They are so keyed in on higher education and good jobs and on making sure adults have a good opinion about them. But, and heaven' know why I didn't see this before, I never thought those kids getting in trouble cared about their education or their reputation. It was wonderful to hear that in the kid's presentation. It's a plus that these kids care about their reputation. I realize now, I just wasn't thinking broad enough.

An equally valuable aspect of conducting this study with youth researchers, however, was that youth offered new insights about dimensions of idleness and disconnection not widely represented in academic literature about disconnected youth.

It was the youth researchers who first argued reputations influenced trajectories of participation in academic and community life and who identified salient features of their community (e.g. everybody knowing everybody) that were connected to disconnection. The YPAR team's early conversations about reputations guided me to examine the role of adults in the construction of idle identities and helped me to understand the ways in which a reputation affected youth. In short, the interpretations and analysis provided by the YPAR team led to a new way of thinking about how pathways to disconnection were constructed in a rural place. While those who have engaged in participatory research are not likely to find these examples unusual, I

see value in articulating these experiences because they make a strong case for how collaborating with youth researchers can broaden adult perspectives and provide a more comprehensive understanding of young lives.

But YPAR can be challenging. It is not an approach I would recommend to other scholars unless they were willing to challenge their assumptions about the purpose of research as well as what it means to do collaborative work. Doing YPAR from within the academy requires one to grapple with unique dilemmas and ethical considerations unique to participatory research. For example, in this study the issues that were most salient were negotiating power dynamics, confidentiality, obtaining consent, and navigating relationships amongst stakeholders.

Despite these caveats, I advocate for scholars to engage with youth to conduct research in such a manner that young people have opportunities to conceptualize problems from their point of view, interpret data, and form conclusions. This is because doing so invites fresh perspectives and can strengthen the quality of empirical research.

Recommendations for Rural Educators and Prevention Professionals

If pathways of development are determined by social and cultural practices (Weisner, 1998), and the pathways to disconnection are being influenced by the practices of adults, I argue we focus on changing these practices. By understanding how we inadvertently reinforce negative reputations and create pathways to disconnection we can start to develop habits and practices that will ensure all youth have access to pathways to success. One way to start to develop an understanding is to listen to the voices of youth who are most affected by these practices and hear their solutions.

Youth Generated Recommendations

Based on the findings of the YPAR project, youth researchers generated a list of recommendations about what could be done to create a more positive environment for youth in

BRC. Their list included:

- Create more activities for teenagers and increase accessibility (e.g. provide transportation and lower costs for youth)

- Build a recreation center

- Involve youth in the planning and decision making for youth activities

- Create roles for youth to use their expertise and to help each other

- Respect youth privacy and always protect confidentiality

Youth also addressed their peers and advised them to become more involved in the community, decrease gossip, and increase their communication with adults.

Similarly, in focus groups and interviews I asked youth for their suggestions about what the community could do to support youth and how adults could help youth rebuild their reputation and become positive members of the community. Suggestions that did not overlap with the list above included inviting youth to be part of groups of youth with "mixed reputations," allowing youth be part of groups that are not designed to "focus on problems," and helping young people to get jobs or be part of community service projects. Several youth requested that adults not use grades as a criterion for admission for programs, unless the program is directly related to schoolwork. As one youth stated, "Just because I don't get good grades, doesn't mean I am not good thinker." Youth talked about the importance of having roles and responsibilities that allow them to "practice being an adult." Youth wanted chances to make mistakes without being judged or made to feel "incompetent." Tony said, "quite a few of us are very constructive, we actually like to help but we just don't know how to help and all that yet." Finally, some youth conveyed an interest in talk with adults about "real" issues such as school, ATOD use, and relationships but were specific about the kinds of conversations they wanted to have with adults. Teenagers wanted to hear about times when adults who had made mistakes

managed to overcome obstacles. As one youth stated, "This shows me I am not alone and that I might be OK." Interestingly, one teenager suggested developing a social marketing campaign designed to encourage adults to make teens feel welcome and improve the climate in BRC for youth. Based on these recommendations from youth, as well as my own analysis of how prevention programming could be improved, I offer my own recommendations for rural providers.

Strategies for Meeting the Needs of Rural Youth

It is not uncommon for rural areas to lack programs and opportunities designed to meet the needs of youth. Often there are few jobs and the youth programs that do exist are narrow in scope consisting of sports or academic support or clubs, which are usually held on school grounds. Occasionally, there may be one or two organizations that provide youth development such as 4-H or Boys and Girls Clubs, which have limited options for older teens (and the options for older youth are often reserved for those with "good" reputations) (Perkins, 2002). This makes it virtually impossible for youth who do not attend school (either by choice or because of expulsion) and who are ostracized from other youth development opportunities to get the knowledge or skills they need to move successfully into adulthood.

A recent study by Carr and Kefalas (2009) indicates that preparing some youth for success, without meeting the needs of others, is problematic for rural communities. This is because most young who are successful in high school will graduate and move on to attend college, join the military or start employment, taking with them their skills and abilities. The others are likely to remain in the community but are unprepared to participate in community life in meaningful ways and are unable to contribute to the economic health of the area. To address this dilemma, I suggest two strategies.

Partnerships with community-based organizations. The first strategy is for prevention

focused community-based organizations (CBO's) to partner with a variety of schools and

institutions in the community, not just the ones that target at risk youth, to provide youth

development programming. CBO's can play a unique role in the healthy development of youth

and can be effective at engaging youth who are most isolated in their communities (McLaughlin,

2000). Partnerships such as this would increase community capacity to provide support for all

youth through the implementation of universal primary prevention programs by employing

strategies such as skills training, mentoring, and tutoring (Kumpfer & Baxley, 1997). Instead of

targeting kids with individual risk factors, education and support would be available to all young

people, making individual risk factors less visible in community settings. This would benefit

youth in several important ways. First, teens who wanted or needed support could access it

without having to worry about bearing the stigma of being identified for special programming or

asking for help. Second, youth who were not identified as needing access to prevention efforts

but were engaging in harmful behaviors would not be left out (according to youth in this study,

most teenagers could benefit from prevention programming—not just youth who had "bad"

reputations). Third, youth development efforts could be delivered without segregating youth,

which would provide young people opportunities to forge and maintain relationships with pro-

social peers. And finally, youth who were not in need of prevention education would still reap

the benefits of a community based program designed to support youth development, which is

consistent with Pittman et al. (2001) who promote the idea that being "problem free does not

mean fully prepared." With this approach, community resources could be leveraged to provide

prevention programming toward meeting the needs of all youth. While some may argue that the

prevention and youth development fields are incompatible, many experts agree the two are

moving toward one another in both goals and practice and that finding common ground between the two approaches would advance programming designed for youth (Catalano, et al., 2002).

Apprenticing youth to participate in community life. The second strategy draws from resiliency literature, which advocates for providing youth with ample opportunities for meaningful participation as a way for young people to discover their strengths, to alter negative self perceptions, and change the negative images others may have of youth (Henderson, 2003).

Community-based prevention services frequently offer school-based programming, provide court-mandated classes, and provide social and recreational opportunities for youth. Data suggested youth wanted to assume new roles and responsibilities. I propose CBO's extend already existing services, by creating roles for young people who were once involved with the CBO in the planning, delivery, and leadership of these programs, as paid assistant instructors or interns. In addition, organizations could provide support and job skills training that would help youth to be successful in these roles. This could be particularly beneficial for youth who have aged out of programs or who no longer are eligible because they have completed a class or graduated. Youth could draw on their expertise about the organization, the curriculum, and the norms and guidelines of the program to assist other youth. In this scenario, CBO's provide opportunities for young people to establish themselves as productive members of the community without having to invent new programs. It builds youth capacity to participate in the adult world under the care and guidance of trusted adults, who have been trained to work with youth who experience obstacles such as substance abuse and expulsion from school.

Professional Development Opportunities

Examining biases about at risk youth. Prior research tells us that the expectations educators have of students play an important role in determining youth success (Spring, 2010). If we are serious about keeping youth connected, we must reconsider how learning environments

foster acceptance, dignity, and inclusion for youth who get pregnant or who experience mental illness, substance abuse, delinquency, or have family members who experience these issues. One step in this direction is to ensure the adults who interact with youth on a regular basis resist negative stereotypes about youth and their backgrounds. To this end, I advocate for educators and prevention professionals have opportunities to investigate their own personal attitudes and beliefs about these issues and start to develop an understanding about how personal biases may guide interactions with young people who experience these situations. For example, this could include the exploration of individual perceptions about addiction as well as how negative stereotypes of young people as a social group permeate society. This might look similar to the way some teacher education programs engage future teachers in examining personal biases about social class, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity.

Confidentiality practices. Although confidentiality is a basic principle of social service work and most teachers receive training about its importance, these trainings often focus on how to be in compliance with federal requirements (e.g. FERPA and IDEA) and how to protect records, files and other documents that contain personally identifiable information. While this is important, it is also valuable to address the social conditions unique to living in intimate communities with small populations that make it easier to identify youth. Adults who work in these types of settings should be encouraged to identify and discuss obstacles relevant to their environment and brainstorm solutions that enable them to share information when they have legitimate educational concerns in ways that will maintain confidentiality.

Suggestions for Future Research

The results of my study have furthered my interest in understanding how social and organizational practices affect youth in varied contexts. I am interested in exploring the experiences of urban and suburban youth because while the contexts are different, I suspect that

some of the practices that result in the social exclusion of youth are the same; as are the myths and assumptions often held about young people and their lives. Future studies about disconnected youth in rural contexts should collect youth perspectives from a larger sample of youth across dissimilar rural areas and seek to identify trends to verify if the conditions or features of growing up rural identified in this study were unique to BRC or are experienced by youth in other rural areas.

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APPENDIX A
YPAR Survey

Survey #_____Date:_____ Age:_____
Gender: Male/Female (please circle) Ethnicity:_____
Last Grade Completed: 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, GED   (please circle)
Are you still enrolled in school? ____Yes   ____No   (check one)

*This is a survey from a community group researching youth engagement in Blue River County. Please answer all questions you are comfortable answering. Answer the questions in as much detail as you need or want. All answers will be kept confidential.

Reputation = an image or a way you are viewed by others.

1) What reputations do you have and where does it affect you most?

2) How do you think you received your reputation? Is it deserved?

3) Do your friends treat you differently based on your reputation? Tell me about it.

4) Does your reputation affect you in school? How and in what way?

5) Have you ever gotten into trouble with an adult figure a because of your reputation? If so, tell me about it.

6) Describe how do you think the community views teens in BRC? How does it affect you daily?

7) How do you think adults contribute to youth reputations?

8) Is the community aware of teens' reputations? Why or why not?

9) How does your reputation affect your family?

10) Does your family have a reputation? If so, how does it affect you?

11) How do drugs and alcohol affect your family's reputation?

12) Do you feel ever that, when in a public place, you, as a teen, are singled-out?
    ____Yes   ____No   (check one)

13) How often do you feel that you are judged in a public place because your age?
    ____Always   ____Never   (check one)

14) Is it easy to acquire drugs/alcohol in Blue River County? ____Yes ____No
(Check one)

15) How does living in Blue River County affect your drug/alcohol use?

16) What are the main reasons you have consumed alcohol? (never drank? skip question)

17) What are the main reasons you have used drugs? (never used? skip question)

18) How do friends or family influence teens to use drugs/alcohol?

19) How does rafting season affect teen use of drugs/alcohol?

20) Have you ever had an adult provide you with drugs/alcohol? ____Yes____No (check one)
   (If so who? Circle ALL that apply) Teachers   Parents   Older friends   Employers
Rafters   Tourists Co-workers Cops   Other? Explain:

21) What obstacles get in your way of doing activities that are available in Blue River County?
     Please explain,

22) What kind of activities do you want to see in Blue River County?

APPENDIX B
Youth Interview Protocol

Interview Format and Overview:
There are three purposes to this interview. 1) Hear your perspectives about aspects of school and community life that invite youth participation/engagement (challenges and benefits), 2) Hear your own experiences about participation in the academic and social life of a rural community, and 3) Hear your ideas about how the adults can support youth in BRC (recommendations to adults and youth).

The interview should take about an hour, is it OK if I record it?
Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I want to hear about your experiences and what you think about your community so the more honest you are the better. The information you provide today will be used in the research but your identity will be kept confidential. I will use a pseudonym or a false name.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Questions
1. How long have you lived in Blue River County (BRC)?
    a. Where did you live before? (if applicable) How was it different/same as BRC?
    b. Tell me about what brought you to BRC?
2. Describe what it is like growing up in BRC?
    a. What are the best parts?
    b. What are the worst things about it?
    c. What are your favorite places to go, or hang out, in BRC? Why?
    d. What part of the county do you live in? Have you lived in other parts?
    e. What it is like to live there….
3. What schools have you attended here in BRC? (or in other places if applicable) What was the last grade you completed?
    a. Are you enrolled in school now?
        i. Tell me what school is like for you. What works for you? What doesn't?
        ii. Have you ever dropped out? Changed schools or missed significant time at school? Tell me about this experience.
    b. If you are not enrolled in school…
        i. Tell me about how you left?
        ii. Looking back, can you tell me what would have helped you stay in school?
        iii. Do you see yourself going back to school in the future?
4. Are you employed? Tell me about what you do, where you work, etc.
5. When you are not in school, tell me about a typical day for you.
6. How would you describe your participation in the community?
7. Do you participate in any clubs, groups, teams, community activities, faith based events?
    a. Tell me how you came to be a part of these organizations?
    b. What you like or dislike about participating in these activities?
    c. Is there any group or aspect of BRC that you would like to be more involved in that you are not? Tell me about it?
    d. What makes it hard for you to join or be involved?

e. What suggestions do you have to make it easier for young people to join and or participate? What could adult do to support you?
8. Tell me about how you came to be a part of the CYS program?
    a. Describe what you like or dislike about CYS?
    b. What suggestions do you have about the program, staff or anything that would improve it?
9. Describe what you want your life to be like in 5 years? (Work? School? Family? Other?)
10. Have you heard about the Summer Research Institute (YPAR project)? What have you heard?
    a. What do you think about this topic of reputations?
    b. Do you feel like you have a reputation in BRC? If so, what for?
    c. How do you think reputations are formed here?
    d. What do you think it would take to get rid of a reputation?

11. What else do you think I should know about that would help me understand what it is like to be a teenager in BRC?
12. . Is there anything that is important we have not talked about yet?

APPENDIX C
YPAR Coding Tree

1) Consequences of a Reputation (free code)
Any talk about how a reputation, positive or negative, affects youth. Reputation could be from anything: family, trouble with the law, etc. and real or perceived.

2) Kinds of Reputations (free code)
Talk about the different types (all) of reputations youth believe they or other youth have in BRC.

3) Building Reputations (tree code)
    3a) Relationships with Adults
    Anytime someone describes relationships or interactions with adults in connection with the way they are seen/viewed by the community. Talk about things adults do that result in or contribute to reputations being formed

    3b) Relationships with Peers
    Anytime someone describes relationships or interactions with peers in connection with the way they are seen/viewed by the community. Talk about things that happen with peers that results in or contributes to reputations being formed

    3c) Relationships with Community
    Anytime someone describes relationships or interactions with the "community" in connection with the way they are seen/viewed by the community. Talk about things that happen at the community level that results in or contributes to reputations being formed.

    3d) Youth Behaviors and Actions -that contribute to a reputation
    Talk about things youth do that result in or contribute to reputations being formed.

4) Reasons for Using Alcohol or Drugs (free code)
Anytime youth talk about why they drink.

5) Reasons for NOT Using Alcohol or Drugs (free code)
Anytime youth talk about why they do not drink. This might include supports or descriptions of aspects of their life or life in BRC that result in no use.

6) Access to Drugs and Alcohol (free code)
Any talk about how or where youth get drugs or alcohol in BRC (could be parties, stories, rafters, purchase etc.). It could also just be talk about access or availability in general.

7) Attitudes about drugs and/or alcohol (free code)
Anytime youth express thoughts or feelings towards alcohol or drugs.

8) Youth Suggestions or Ideas (free code)
Any talk about making BRC a better place for youth. It could include suggestions for things youth want to see in BRC or changes they want from adults or community members.

9) Obstacles to youth staying engaged in school, community or social life in Chaffee County (free code)
Any time someone talks about, or tells a story, about why they are not involved or have had problems being involved in the community or school (or any aspect of BRC life). For example, not being allowed near school or a business in town or feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome.

10) Interesting Quotes (free code)
Any quote that you think captures something important but you are not sure where it goes.

APPENDIX D
Table of Frequencies from YPAR Survey Provided in Chapters 5-7

Chapter	Survey Question	Response	
5	Do you feel ever that you are singled-out for being a teen in a public place?	Yes	58%
		No	42%
5	How often do you feel that you are judged in a public place because your age?	Always	52%
		Never	38%
		N/A	10%
6	What reputations do you have and where does it affect you most?	Positive	32%
		Negative	41%
		Unknown	27%
7	How do you think you received your reputation? Is it deserved?	Yes	60%
		No	23%
		Maybe	17%