AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF
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This dissertation explores the real world problem of rural youth out-migration and finds that the central problem is one of persistent class difference in this rural Oregon town. The research that informs this dissertation was conducted in a rural community of approximately 2300 residents in Eastern Oregon, here called Talltown. Data was collected through participant observation, photovoice (n = 8) and semi-structured interview (n = 63) among adolescents, emerging adults, and adults, specifically those working with local youth. The dissertation explores the ways in which Talltown youth encounter, internalize, and strategically enact dominant and counter norms of the local and larger fields. The primary finding of this dissertation is that as rural communities vie for position in the era of global neoliberalism, they discursively impose a similar competitive logic upon their youth, which reinforces the myth of meritocracy yet supports persistent class difference. Using the themes of "going somewhere" and "getting stuck," this dissertation aims to make visible, and thus challenge the hierarchical system with which class and other forms of socially constructed difference persist.
Going Somewhere or Getting Stuck: Transitions to Adulthood in Rural Oregon

by
Sarah E. Cunningham

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

____________________________________________________
Sarah E. Cunningham, Author
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Introduction

Fair and the Socialization of Talltown Youth

The sun is shining in a cloudless sky and it is warm out, with temperatures in the 70s. The parking lot of the fairgrounds is nowhere near capacity, as it will be the evening of the destruction derby, but there is a good-sized crowd for today’s 4-H pig showings. There are lots of older couples and middle-aged couples, some with small children. The overwhelming style of dress is casual. Most of the women wear jeans and patterned blouses, though a few wear t-shirts. The men are also wearing jeans along with t-shirts, bearing logos and images, or button-up western style shirts. Men also wear cowboy hats or baseball caps. They find seats in the bleachers, recently acquired and donated by a community group. Others gather and stand around the back side of the ring, near the opening to the pig barn.

There are youth in attendance too. Some find seats to watch friends and relatives show their pigs. Others walk about in groups or in hand holding pairs, stopping to chat with other youth as they play carnival games and go on the rides. Occasionally I notice a young person approach an adult, with whom they briefly converse before the adult hands over some money, at which point the young person rejoins his or her friends in line for sodas and snacks available for purchase from one of several vendors. Among the spectator youth there are a couple of noticeable styles.
Some of the young women wear jeans or shorts with stylish shirts, many of which are sleeveless and rather feminine with ruffles or patterns, while others wear t-shirts or solid-colored tank tops. Among the young men there are lots of blue jeans and t-shirts with baseball caps. There are some cowboy hats worn by young men, but far fewer than among the adults.

The pig show begins with an older man in a checkered shirt and jeans standing in the middle of the ring. An apparent expert on pigs, he is the judge. He welcomes everyone, thanks the spectators for being there, and invites the first group of youth to enter the ring to show their pigs. Out they come, round after round. The pigs are mostly of the pink variety, though there some black ones and a few that are black with a pinkish-white stripe round the middle. There are also patterns in how the youth showing the pigs are dressed. Some wear green polo shirts with the 4-H logo on the breast. Others wear navy polo shirts bearing the name of a livestock breeder on the back. Still others wear white long-sleeved button-up shirts with western detailing around the pockets and collar. A few of the girls wear belts that sparkle and bandannas or other eye-catching accessories in their hair. As they show their pigs, each youth carries a stick, like a cane, with a curved handle, which they tap against their pig's shoulders or haunches directing it around the ring. As they do this, many smile brightly at the judge as he passes. Ranking is important for Talltown youth. It is part of their lives, as is the idea that participating is better than not participating.

This annual county fair is known locally simply as Fair. It is a multi-day event that takes place each September at the fairgrounds in Talltown, a community of
approximately 2,300 located about 50 miles from the nearest town in any direction, 100 miles from the nearest metropolitan area of approximately 20,000 people.

Talltown gets to host Fair each year because it is the seat of Talltown County, one of the largest counties in Oregon located in the eastern part of the state. Fair is an important ritual for the Talltown community. It is an event that is highly symbolic, in that it enacts the dominant norms of the local community, namely community involvement and hard work, and the process, writ-small, by which Talltown youth acquire and negotiate status. Widespread community participation in Fair, as spectators, as vendors, 4-H judges and leaders, or as 4-H, rodeo, and destruction derby participants, evidences the power of this event to reinforce the norm of community involvement.

In some ways Fair is an event like you might find in any other sparsely populated, resource-dependent US county. Like other county fairs, people go there to eat, buy handicrafts and souvenirs, and to be entertained. There are vendors selling food and beverages, soda and slushies, pizza, hotdogs and cheeseburgers, “Mexican food,” elephant ears, peanut brittle in a variety of flavors, and sandwiches of the locally preferred cut of beef, tri-tip. Fair also has vendors selling handicrafts and souvenirs, especially jewelry, wallets and purses, t-shirts, and artwork, such as the landscape and wildlife scenes cut into and painted on old saw blades. Fair also offers entertainment in the form of carnival games, like the strong man game where one swings a mallet, dart throwing, "fishing" with magnets, ball toss, and pig races, all with prizes to be won, some sort of toy, like a stuffed animal, or a pet goldfish. There
is entertainment to be had in carnival rides too, including rides with little cars in which people sit as they rotate and spin, one that lifts people into the air with their legs hanging free, a pirate-themed bounce-house, and a Ferris wheel. There are even elephants one can ride at Fair. Yet another form of entertainment at Fair is the spectator events. Major spectator events at Fair include a demolition derby, which is locally known as the destruction derby, a rodeo, and 4-H animal showings.

Fair is a celebration of the Talltown area’s local culture, especially that historically rooted in cattle ranching and timber harvesting and processing. So in addition to the typical county fair livestock displays, Fair celebrates the cowboy and his skills with various rodeo events, including bucking bronc riding, bull riding, calf roping, and horse racing around barrels. The cowboy is again celebrated, alongside other agricultural and logging practices from days of yore, at the Historic Village, sited at the fairgrounds, which is usually open only by appointment, but is open all day, every day during Fair. Here there are historic dwellings and other structures on display, each filled with items showing how cowboys and ranchers and farmers once used them. Especially prominent are tools for harvesting and processing agricultural and natural resource products. There are displays of antique farming and timber equipment, including tractors, wagons, and machines that plant, harvest and haul potatoes (an early crop for the region), winter wheat (which supplanted potatoes until cattle ranching became dominant), hay, and fallen timber.

Besides getting an annual dose of local history and culture, the people of Talltown go to Fair to socialize with friends and neighbors. It is said that “everyone
goes to Fair," including youth and adults from Talltown and from other parts of the county. Since Fair occurs each year before the start of term at the state universities, youth who have been off at college (and will be again) attend too. It is also a place to catch up with people who have moved away, but that have come back to visit during Fair. People also go to Fair to support the community’s youth, in particular those with a 4-H project, and especially those whose 4-H project involves raising and showing the larger livestock animals, including cows, pigs, and sheep. There are lots of ways that people can participate in the ritual of Fair. In addition to their 4-H projects, you can enter certain rodeo events, even the destruction derby. Adults can also participate in these ways, as mentors to 4-H participants, as judges for the events, or as rodeo or destruction derby participants. Youth and adults alike can attend fair as spectators of events, consumers of food and drink, players of games, and riders of rides. Youth and adults can also pitch in to keep Fair running, by selling tickets, disposing of trash, preparing and selling refreshments, selling raffle tickets to benefit different community groups, and getting the main arena set for the destruction derby. When Fair is over, adults can support both local youth and community agricultural character by purchasing the 4-H animals youth have raised.

For those who left Talltown right after high school, particularly to go away to college, Fair is a bit like a high school reunion, but with more teachers and parents in attendance. And in fact, many high school class reunions take place around the time of Fair, in pursuit of greater attendance due to convenient timing. Fair, like other rituals, maintains and reinforces a certain social order. At Fair, adolescents compete
with each other in the 4-H barns, much as they do in the halls of the middle school and high school. Emerging adults who attend Fair compete with each other as well, though in less formal ways, in terms of both local and larger field norms. It is this, the competitive arena of the emerging adult, for which Fair prepares adolescents. It imparts and reinforces local and larger field truths, through the enactment of two key community norms, both of which are symbolized at Fair in youth 4-H participation and competition. The norm of community involvement is apparent in the sheer numbers that attend Fair and the myriad of ways in which people take part in it. But what is perhaps most important about Talltown and apparent at Fair is the community’s investment in the development of its youth, particularly their work ethic, something at which local discourse suggests the Talltown community is particularly adept. It is this belief about the community, that Fair reinforces above all, and it is on the basis of these norms that Talltown adolescents are socialized and emerging adults are judged.

*Why Rural?*

Why rural? Because most of the world's policymakers and big influencers of policymakers are from more urban settings, rural places are left with less representation in the global political economic sphere. Why the rural U.S.? Because where anthropologists have focused on rural places and communities, they have tended to do so outside the U.S. The force of global neoliberalism has wreaked havoc on rural communities in the developing world. For a time it worked to the advantage
of U.S. interests. To some extent it still does, for example in U.S. business relationships with transnational corporations. But increasingly the externalities of neoliberalism are being felt in the U.S. as in other parts of the world. This dominating political-economic and socio-cultural force is finally producing similar results in dissimilar places. Today, rural communities everywhere have seen livelihoods in agriculture and natural resource sectors dwindle, resulting in greater dependence on the service sector of employment and in an increasing number of places, poverty. This has also led to demographic changes to rural communities. As working people seek employment in other places, populations age. Newcomers arrive, be they immigrants looking for work in the agricultural sector or former urban- and suburbanites coming for peace, quiet and telecommuting. Such changes suggest that the nature of rural communities, perhaps all communities, may be changing as a result.

Why Youth?

Why youth? Because although policies affect youth, just as they do adults, too often youthful voices are missing from the discourse that influences policy. And still, it is youth who will inherit the consequences of today's policies. Why rural youth? Because most of what we know about rural place and community has been "overwhelmingly recorded through adult eyes" and thereby promotes adult interests (Panelli et al. 2007:2). Because youth "are integral players in the life and work of rural societies, although often their lives are quite different from those of the adults in such settings" (Panelli et al. 2007:2). And because changes in rural communities
affect youth as much as they affect adults, if in different ways. Why U.S. rural youth? Because "rural geographies of childhood and youth in 'western' settings have only developed in breadth since the mid-1990s as wider debates concerning social exclusion, marginalisation, and otherness, have informed studies of children and young people as...under-recognized rural dwellers" (Panelli et al. 2007:2). Where youth "are coming from and why the positions from which [they] speak may be subject to change and variation in and through time...is no different from social science research with adults" (James 2007:269). The "key theoretical tension" here is, the relationship between [youth] as a social space, [youth] as a generational category, and [the youth] as an individual representative of that category and inhabitant of that space" (James 2007:270). As social actors, youth can speak to issues in the society at large, something particularly valuable in times of rapid and drastic change, such as is happening under global neoliberalism today. What youth have to say thus addresses "many of the social, economic, and political inequalities" experienced locally and globally (James 2007:268).

It is also pertinent to study youth today because they are at the center of at least two broad trends that have particular consequence for the future of our societies. Perhaps the most noticeable of these trends is an increase in the duration of participation in schooling (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004) because of its association with upward social mobility and success in the modern world. And yet, "gaining a formal education does not necessarily lead to better employment opportunities and may just create unrealistic expectations" (Panelli et al 2007:5), especially in a climate of
economic recession. Here, in the fields of education and work, the consequences of global neoliberalism are coming home to roost in the U.S. Youth are social actors and practitioners of culture just like adults. In these fields especially, youth today, like adults, "negotiate their everyday lives with a range of different people in different settings" (Panelli et al. 2007:5), strategically positioning themselves as best they can.

As rural youth are socialized in this context of global neoliberalism and under the explanatory model that is the myth of meritocracy, they face a problematic contradiction. As they internalize these truths and landscapes of opportunity change, it becomes difficult for youth to see themselves making their adult lives in these communities. Meanwhile, those youth who remain in their rural communities (i.e. those unsuccessful under the myth of meritocracy) are devalued to the point that their contributions to community are under-recognized and they are overlooked as a portion of the community in which to invest. This is a process especially visible in rural communities, and especially visible among youth making the transition to adulthood, but it is, most significantly, a problem facing the whole of the U.S. society.

**Why Talltown?**

Why Talltown? First, the community is already somewhat familiar to me, by way of my participation in university ethnographic field schools in Talltown, and my coding of the interview and field note data that a dozen or so students had collected in each of the field schools. Owing to this familiarity, I had some insight into the Talltown community, even in the earliest stages of my research design. Once in the
field, I was also able to spend less time acquainting locals with the idea of an anthropologist hanging around trying to get to know them, what they do and why, because the community had already experienced several summers of ethnographic field school students traipsing around doing the same sort of thing. Second, Talltown is a rural community of the frontier. It is far from more densely populated areas, giving it an isolated quality that is often identified as characteristically rural, and prominent in Talltown community discourse. Third, the population of Talltown is large enough to facilitate my study and confidentiality, but not so big that it ceases to be considered a small town. And fourth, Talltown has a strong tradition, through several scholarship funds, of sending its young people off to college, and so represents an opportunity to study this trend of the wider U.S. society within a rural context.

*Rural Youth Out-Migration*

Despite the tremendous work rural communities put into the development and socialization of their youth, the climax of this transition to adulthood is not universally based on a local rural community narrative, if ever it was in the past. On the contrary, socialization of rural youth today imparts both local community culture and the culture of the wider U.S. society. As such, the practices of Talltown youth are rooted in and strategically responsive to the dominant norms of both local and larger fields. This multi-field strategic practice is particularly evident in the widespread phenomenon of youth out-migration.

The permanent out-migration of youth during the transition to adulthood,
particularly by the best and brightest youth, is a problem commonly cited by U.S. rural community leaders, including those of Talltown, and is seen as leading to an older than average population, smaller workforce, and fewer taxpayers and customers. Accordingly, studies of rural youth out-migration from other communities to date have shed light on both who tends to leave and why. Through these and other rural studies it has become clear that the force of neoliberal globalization and the economic and social changes it has wrought in rural places, have resulted in a changed landscape of opportunity. This, in turn, has compelled increasing numbers of rural youth to seek their fortunes and make their futures outside the communities in which they were raised. Rural youth of relative privilege, who are college-bound, leave their communities following high school. Those of relatively less privilege leave for other forms of post-secondary education and experience, and those of relative non-privilege stay.

In believing in the myth of meritocracy, people reinforce it, allowing privilege to continue on, vastly unevenly distributed, without people being aware of it. In studies of rural youth out-migration specifically, it has also become clear that the myth of meritocracy, and its application to the pursuit of the four-year college degree, is widely accepted in rural communities as it is in the U.S. society at large. This is the idea that through a combination of individual hard effort and innate abilities, one can achieve the symbolic merits that they desire, particularly along the college route. Meritocracy stands, or so it seems, opposed to systems whereby achievement and privilege are had on the basis of ascribed characteristics, such as class, gender, and
ethnicity. What I call the myth of meritocracy is something believed in, and yet what is actually happening in Talltown and other places, belies the myth.

Talltown community discourse tends to frame the adolescent population in processual terms. Those who are college-bound are "going somewhere" and those who are not, are "troubled" by broken or poor homes, and in the process of "getting stuck," as they fail to keep pace with their college-bound peers. Upon leaving adolescence and entering into the transition to adulthood, rural community discourse frames these former adolescents, not in processual terms, but in more concrete status terms. Those who obtained a post-secondary degree or certification have "gone somewhere" and are "successful," while those who do not are "stuck," "in a rut," or worse, "trouble." In this way the Talltown community discursively positions youth in relation to the myth of meritocracy.

Research Objectives and Questions

My research objectives in this study are (1) to learn about Talltown youth cultural practices and social positions, as shaped by the structuring forces of their lives, especially neoliberalism, the myth of meritocracy that supports it, the changes to rural communities it has led to, and the cultural construct that is the contemporary transition to adulthood, (2) clarify the structuring forces in their lives, particularly as they are conveyed in community discourse, (3) to understand how youth make decisions about where and how to make their futures, (4) to know how local and larger fields intersect in Talltown youth cultural practice, and (5) to discover the
consequences of this for youth, rural communities, and society. Through a complex analysis of this socio-cultural phenomenon, I aim to contribute to the literature on rural youth out-migration. In particular, I aim to complicate it, to demonstrate the breadth of variation in the experience of youth in a single rural community. I also aim to add a certain amount of youth-driven critical discourse to this literature, and situate it in fields of class and neoliberal ideology.

On a more theoretical and conceptual level, my objective is to further problematize the relationship between structure and agency. Using the myth of meritocracy, I aim to explore the ways in which subjects, in this case youth, encounter and internalize discursive norms, and how their ability to strategically respond to them is shaped by various forms of socially constructed difference. In other words, I aim to further problematize how the socio-spatial landscapes of opportunity, under global neoliberalism, differently affect rural youths' options for strategic cultural practice.

What is needed, first and foremost, to address a perceived problem of rural youth-out migration, is an understanding of how youth strategize within the discourses that structure their lives, especially the myth of meritocracy. Thus I pose the following research questions, which I will address in the chapters that follow. 1) In what ways do rural youth encounter and internalize the discourse of meritocracy? 2) How do they strategically position themselves within this discourse? 3) How do forms of socially constructed difference, such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity, pave or block pathways available to youth in their strategic negotiation of position within the discourse of meritocracy?
Organization

In this introductory chapter I have introduced readers to the important community ritual known as Fair, as well as the dominant community norms it enacts. I have given my reasons for undertaking a study in the rural U.S. and among youth. I have also introduced my field site, the real world problem perceived there, and my theoretical and conceptual approach to it. In what remains of this Introduction, I outline the organization for the rest of this dissertation.

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I discuss the conceptual frameworks and literature that make it possible to answer my research questions. It opens with a discussion of neoliberal globalization, the discourse of meritocracy that supports it and its resultant rural restructuring, as the context in which rural youth understand and interpret the opportunities available to them. Chapter One continues with a discussion of relevant theories in the study of youth and that most persistent form of socially constructed difference, class. Chapter One closes with a discussion of theories about structure and agency, which will be essential for answering the question of how youth strategically negotiate position in the discourse of local and larger fields.

In Chapter Two I discuss the methods by which I have sought to answer my research questions. It opens with a reflexive discussion of how I was perceived in Talltown and the importance of anonymity and confidentiality. Chapter Two proceeds with a discussion of my experience obtaining Institution Review Board approval for this study and the impacts of that process on my study. It concludes with a review of
my sample, sampling techniques, the data collection methods I utilized and my approach to the analysis and interpretation of findings.

In the third and fourth chapters I present ethnographic data from Talltown that which highlight the challenges and opportunities facing the community as a whole and the youth who may potentially spend their adult lives there. Chapter Three emphasizes the community level and focuses especially on how Talltown, as a rural community in the global neoliberal context, maintains and reinforces certain discursive norms. This chapter sets the scene wherein Talltown youth encounter norms of the local and larger fields. Chapter Four is focused specifically on the youth experience of Talltown discourse, including where and how they respond to it. Together, these chapters highlight the norms that dominate Talltown discourse, especially community involvement and hard work, with which youth positions are evaluated and within which youth strategically negotiate position.

In Chapter Five I present a series of youth case studies. These are meant to demonstrate some of the specific ways in which Talltown youth cultural practice is strategic, particularly within the constraints of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. In these case studies I show how Talltown youth variously reproduce, resist, rework, and are resilient to the dominant norms of the local and larger fields.

In Chapter Six, I summarize the important norms of Talltown and the various ways that youth encounter them. In Chapter Six, I also discuss the Talltown youth hierarchy as I have observed it in order to make it visible and ultimately deconstruct it. Also discussed in this chapter are patterns in the ways youth strategically respond to
the hierarchy with which they are evaluated. Lastly in this chapter I discuss the significance of my work in Talltown, with specific attention to how it helps to fill the gaps in practical understanding about rural youth out-migration, and theoretical knowledge of the strategic nature of youth cultural practice.

In the last section of this dissertation, I share my conclusions about the myth of meritocracy and its consequences for youth, rural communities, and the larger society. In particular, I question the validity of the idea of the social hierarchy as something climbable, and call for greater awareness of the hierarchical system, by which inequality, particularly that which is class-based, persists. Lastly in the Conclusion, I make recommendations as to what communities might do to challenge the myth of meritocracy, better support all of their youth, and in so doing, better ensure the futures of the communities themselves.
Chapter One: Conceptual Frameworks

In the course of answering research questions I have posed, I make use of theories and literature relating to several important conceptual frameworks, each of which I discuss in this chapter. The first is neoliberal globalization, including the way it affects rural places and the discourse of meritocracy that supports it, and the way it affects rural places. Second are the opposing but interrelated forces of structure and agency, between which cultural practice becomes strategic. The third and final conceptual framework discussed in this chapter is youth and class.

Neoliberal Globalization

What is it?

Globalization, or at least overlapping regionalization, has been a reality of the human experience for as long as humans have been around. People have always migrated and spread technologies, so although globalization has intensified so that “most lifestyles are intricately tied to a web of global relations,” it is not new (Nayak 2003:170). The effect of this expanding web of relations is time-space distanciation (Giddens 1991), wherein people are aware of the emergent global society, its supposed benefits, and of the ability, of some, if not all, to participate in it.

The major economic system that perpetuates, and is perpetuated by, globalization today is a particularly virulent form of capitalism, known as neoliberalism. This is a system predicated on economic growth through the free
market that involves “the rise of transnational corporations, the development of global financial markets, and the internationalisation of production, consumption and labor” where trade is facilitated by institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Cocklin 2002:2). As loans are extended and called due from less developed areas, local economies are marginalized in deference to intensified commodity production, which reinforces the socio-cultural effects of such changed landscapes (Ilbery 1998). Neoliberal globalization also involves the transnational spread of strategies for state regulation that assure capitalist relations of power and accumulation (Robertson 2004) leading the state to perform, more often than not, the role of protector of profits, not people (Sumner 2005) or environment.

Neoliberalism has been unsuccessful in its prime directive, stimulating capital accumulation, except in so far as it has dispossessed many and concentrated wealth in the hands of the few, via transnational corporations (Harvey 2005). Recession, as has been recently experienced in the U.S. and across the globe, is a sign of this failure. Circumscribed neoliberalism, typified in the welfare state, has been more successful than sustained neoliberalism although it has not been and is not today the dominant model in the United States. Nor does it seem likely to be so. Listening to debates on taxes and entitlement programs, between current political candidates and pundits, for example, one clearly hears the dominance of an ideology of reduced barriers to trade that places near complete faith in the idea of an efficient free market and success by individual skill and effort, that supports it.

Neoliberalism has become hegemonic. It has largely confined economic
understanding within strictly market terms, thus naturalizing "the economy" in recent
public discourse despite the fact that economies are actually place and time specific
(Gibson-Graham 2006). Because neoliberalism, through globalization, informs
structures of power, it has political-economic effects and socio-cultural effects. We
can therefore frame globalization as a process of people becoming closer, with the
result being a common global field of practice in which people (re)make identities and
cultural boundaries (Fass 2007). Institutions are the primary means by which the
global field of practice is extended, and when they work together, as have economic
and educational institutions, their influence becomes all the stronger. Neoliberalism is
a powerful force in the world today. Consider the alignment of contemporary
educational policy and trends of the contemporary workforce, the existence of both
advanced medical technology and masses without healthcare, or the relationship
between consumerism and the reflexive project of self (Giddens 1991). In each of
these areas, free market influence has led to increased distinction and disparity and as
disparity becomes something people increasingly encounter, they have an increased
need to explain how it comes to be. It is here that they myth of meritocracy comes
into the service of neoliberalism, by suggesting that those who are unsuccessful under
market fundamentalism are so either because they do not have the innate abilities
required, or because they have not worked hard enough to be so.

Yet even powerful new ideals are filtered through local experience. So
neoliberal globalization is not totalizing, even where people enthusiastically remake
their identities in response to it. Some of the things people do continue to exist
outside the logic of neoliberal globalization and what is economic may in fact exist outside “wage labor, market exchange of commodities, and capitalist enterprise” (Gibson-Graham 2006:69).

Because people encounter and filter the force of neoliberal globalization in their everyday lives, local practices and cultures not only persist, they become strategic (Fass 2007) in their ability to embody norms counter to or outside of neoliberal globalization. Through local people’s agency neoliberal globalization becomes heterogeneous and open-ended (Thorne 2008). Thus adaptation to globalization and the process of individuation are a “dual strategy” (Hengst 2005:30) utilized in the global-local nexus (Nayak 2003). And it is here that new cultural spaces can be formed through the process of (re)localizing global ideas and practices (Hengst 2005). In Talltown, for instance, the idea of leaving one's community to go out and see something of the world is (re)localized as a way for people to learn the value of Talltown, and appreciate all that life in Talltown offers.

Experiences of neoliberal globalization and cultural responses to it can be similar even in places that are seemingly very different from one another (Katz 2004). In the process of neoliberal globalization, expanded consumption becomes familiar around the world, even though not everyone is able to achieve it. Some people remain stranded on its edges, feeling the expansion of neoliberal globalization even as they are constrained by it. In disparate places, neoliberal globalization results in increased monetization of local economies, changed relations of local production, and sharpened socioeconomic stratification. Households are less and less able to achieve subsistence...
by traditional or historical means. This results in a particular experience of neoliberal globalization for youth, particularly working class youth, who find they are unprepared for likely forms of future employment as a result of the schism between the skills and knowledge they have obtained and those that are likely to be useful in the future (Katz 2004). De-industrialization, increasing reliance on science, and the shifts in global markets that come with neoliberal globalization lead to shrinking wages and benefits which threaten blue-collar workers and often result in crises of poverty and unemployment in rural and urban settings alike (Carr and Kefalas 2009).

In the U.S. and abroad, technological advances have allowed many tasks to be done by machines and computers, thereby reducing the need for labor in the industrial, agricultural, and natural resource sectors. This has been encouraged by neoliberal ideology as a strategy for keeping costs down, thus maximizing profits. What limited jobs and sectors persist are also increasingly outsourced, for similar cost-reducing and profit-maximizing reasons. The postindustrial economy that has emerged in the place of traditional forms of production, is largely “based on services, tourism, recreation, government, culture, education, and information technology,” although this new economy has not fully replaced the old ones (Robbins 2009:360,372).

Neoliberal globalization has drawn attention to its apparent successes in particular areas of the world, notably urban centers of more developed countries, while concealing failures in others, in particular rural places and less developed countries. There have been positive and negative effects of neoliberal globalization, each of which are spread unevenly (Nayak 2003). Under neoliberalism, some people and
places benefit at the expense of others. Uneven development is a major externality of neoliberalism, forced especially upon rural people of the less developed world. Thus “spatial differentials in employment opportunities represent lesser and greater levels of economic development” (Kearney 1986:331). Increasingly, this is a pattern is evident in the more developed world.

When the ideology of neoliberalism falters, as it has been seen to do in the recent recession, continued popular and political support of neoliberalism depends greatly upon the myth of meritocracy. Meritocracy is a "form of social engineering, aimed at identifying the talents of members of society so that individuals can be selected for appropriate opportunities" (Khan 2011:8). As one of most defining ideas of U.S. culture in this era, the myth of meritocracy serves neoliberalism by framing a discursive reality in which those who succeed (i.e. achieve upward social and economic mobility) supposedly do so on the basis of their own ability and hard work, particularly hard work in the development of skills, and for middle-class people, especially through college. Emphasis on "hard work and achievement has naturalized socially constituted distinctions, making differences in outcomes appear a product of who people are rather than a product of the conditions of their making" (Khan 2011:9). This is how meritocracy proves to be a myth. As our national and global societies have become more open, they have nonetheless become increasingly unequal. This is "the great trick of privilege" (Khan 2011:40) and of neoliberalism. As policies move to make economies more "efficient," work becomes more skilled and laborers need to obtain further, often specialized, education and training. This is the new kind of labor
seen as the realm of the socially and economically successful. According to the myth of meritocracy, social and economic success is only attainable through one's own ability and hard work. Socially constructed difference is explainable by these same ideas. The myth of meritocracy obfuscates persistent social stratification and perpetuates certain political and economic ideologies. Although the U.S. society is more open than ever before, more gender and racial inclusive, for example, it is also more unequal. And yet it is with the myth of meritocracy that U.S. culture explains the successes of some, alongside the failures of others, as consequences of personal choice, not structural inequity.

Observable differences between people help to naturalize hierarchies and encourage people to treat them like ladders (Khan 2011). If we assume that everyone in their right mind would work hard to obtain success, if that and a little natural ability are all that is required to attain it, and inequality yet persists, this even worsens, people are simply out-competing one another. Social distinction is explained in the context of the assumption that hard work and innate ability are culturally supposed to fairly appraise and discipline people, first in the school system and then in the workplace. And so here again, the myth of meritocracy reinforces neoliberalism. The logic of the myth suggests that those who are not socially and economically successful are those who chose not to work as hard as they could have, or should have. "Inequality is" seen to be the "result of the characteristics of individuals—their hard work, their choices" (Khan 2011:72). And so an optimism about the possibility of upward social and economic mobility persists, a myth of meritocracy, and the trick of neoliberalism—the
victim-blaming explanation of disparity with the myth of meritocracy—goes unchallenged. It is this aspect of neoliberalism that I address in this dissertation, with the aim of deconstructing it in relation to rural youth.

**Neoliberalism in the Rural U.S.**

Rural communities, especially those that are relatively geographically isolated, may have particular difficulty coping with the pressures of globalization (Sumner 2005). Agro-industrialization decreases the number of farms and people employed on them, which in turn leads to depopulation and withdrawal of services, often including quality education and healthcare. These are compelling reasons for many young people, especially those who are college educated or bound, to leave their rural communities and make their lives elsewhere, as Carr and Kefalas (2009) found in Iowa. When this happens en masse, rural communities face population changes, but even when population change is not drastic, a perceived youth out-migration problem may indicate a different, but related social and symbolic problem, that of persistent class difference.

"Historically, the social, demographic, and economic characteristics of American rural communities have been closely linked to a multifaceted dependency on natural resource-based commodity production,” but with the rise of a post-industrial economy “today few communities are solely or even primarily dependent upon traditional resource-based rural industries such as mining, agriculture, or timber production” (Winkler et al. 2007:481-2). Such economic change is part of "rural
"restructuring" (Nelson 2001) or the shift from "traditional land uses, economic activities, and social arrangements" (Gosnell and Abrams 2011:303) historically characteristic of rural communities, to those that are "post-productivist" (Wilson 1990). In coping with these changes, rural places are compelled to alter their social and economic strategies. One way to cope with the uneven development of neoliberalism is by seeking wage employment, often outside of the traditional agricultural and natural resource economies of rural areas, as when farmwives in the U.S. increasingly turned to off-farm work in response to the industrialization of agriculture (Barlett 1993). Seen through a local, emic lens, neoliberal globalization promotes new social relationships (Cole 2008) in rural communities. As working class people are de-skilled, networking becomes increasingly important in finding a job (Mathews 2009). As extractive industries decline, pushing people to migrate to more urban areas in which opportunities and capital are concentrated, the meaning of community itself can change along with demographics. What was once a community of place, a group of shared fate, may now be a place with distinct and persistent communities of status.

Young people in rural places that are bedroom communities for metro areas may fare better than their relatively more isolated counterparts in terms of their ability to access education or training and employment in the coveted and seemingly booming high-skill jobs in the creative economy of the contemporary U.S. (Florida 2008). Yet even in these places, there may be potentially negative social and cultural consequences, such as class divisions between professionals and non-professionals or
the replacement of rural community character with a more suburban community character.

Amenity migrants, those who move to rural places seeking natural and cultural amenities (Gosnell and Abrams 2011), can also contribute to such a class divide. Neoliberal globalization has in this way commodified the rural landscape. Today, rural landscapes are valued for reasons beyond their productive capacity. Increasingly, it is not merely rural land that is bought and sold, but an idealized rural lifestyle (McCarthy 2008). This trend, along with advancements in communications and transportation infrastructure, have made it possible for people, especially college-educated people, to live at greater distance from their places of employment, but closer to the natural amenities, such as outdoor recreation and beautiful landscapes that often exist in rural places of relative geographic isolation.

As amenity migrants seek a quality of life they believe a rural setting will afford them, they alter “the ownership, use, and governance of rural lands” and “the composition and socioeconomic dynamics of rural communities” (Gosnell and Abrams 2011:1). On the surface this may mean positive changes for the rural community. Because of their pursuit of natural and cultural capital, amenity migrants infuse rural communities with human and financial capital, but they may also detract from social capital, as, for example, when they live in the part(s) of town that were more recently constructed, or when they become absentee landlords or hobby farmers.

A community is an enduring pattern of social relations, sometimes thought to be at odds with the market-oriented relations of capitalist society. But perhaps the two
are not so at odds. Through the theme of accountability Dudley (1996) describes rural communities of Minnesota as mobilized to reproduce the logic of market fundamentalism. It is follow-through on the deal that counts. A handshake makes a deal and community members must live up to such expectations.

Still, community cannot merely be something imposed by a supra-local field, such as the global commodities market. A community is, at least partly, local and self-determined in its origins. So perhaps, "a place becomes a community when people use the pronoun 'we'" (Sennett 1998:137). In discourse, this may be reinforced with talk about other kinds of places, and how, when describing them, the local community is the point of reference, the norm from which other places deviate.

Following the neoliberal turn, places that were once very communal have become increasingly private, and interconnectedness has been replaced by individualism (Salamon 2003). This makes it somewhat difficult to imagine community as a sense of "we," particularly armed with knowledge about rural places where social and economic changes led to resentment and distrust against newcomers, especially those who are low-income people or ethnic minorities. In this way, neoliberal globalization has also led to a deepening of the social divide which has become further embedded in patterns of residency and schooling (Thorne 2008).

This dissertation will illuminate a particular combination of ideas about community, shaped as they are by neoliberal ideology and its supporting myth of meritocracy. It will show how the singularly competitive logic of this larger system is applied in the assessment of rural youth. It will also show this logic perpetuates ideas
about status and privilege, locally as it does globally.

*Structure and Agency*

In order to understand the impact of a force like neoliberal globalization, on social actors like rural youth it is necessary to understand the relationship between structure and agency. One way to understand this relationship is with theories focused on power, typical in the work of Foucault (1980, 1997). Another way to theorize the relationship between structure and agency is by following the lead of Bourdieu (1984, 1985, 1986, 1989) and emphasizing practice. Other approaches involve focusing on the shortcomings of these two major theoretical trends with further development of the concepts of agency and resistance. It is to these theoretical interpretations of the relationship between structure and agency that this section turns, for each of these approaches contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how youth become acquainted with different strategic moments and how they strategize within them.

*Power*

Michel Foucault, the post-structuralist, characterized identity as shaped and defined by power relations (Lamont and Fournier 1992) that permeate the mind and the body in the form of discourse (Foucault 1997). The power in discourse implies a particular form of discipline, one reliant on continuous enactment of a discursive theme, a particular and prominent idea, on subjects’ minds and bodies as they move through space and time. Through this continuous enactment, subjects are disciplined
in physical structures by the partitioning of space, by the categorization of identities, by temporal division and elaboration, through gesture and the body, and by defining the relationship between the body and various objects.

This power of discipline over bodies can be seen to involve three processes. The first of these is hierarchical observation (Foucault 1997), wherein embedded surveillance is specified along the lines of existing hierarchy. Consciousness of a state of continual observation, which serves the functioning of power, or panopticism, is thus created. This is an observation by the powerful with many social contexts, including personal interaction, in school, and in workplaces. The second process involved in disciplinary power is the “mass of behavior” in which norms, in the form of discursive themes, are internalized by subjects as the basis by which to judge themselves and others for “departures from correct behaviour” (Foucault 1997:178). This “subtle procedure” by which discursive themes are normalized imposes homogeneity through certain truths of the era, but it also makes it possible to differentiate between subjects (Foucault 1997:178). The subject is formed within power relations by normalizing judgment, in the sense that normalizing judgment is the context within which the subject is defined and in which the subject must interpret and negotiate position. The third process involved in disciplinary power is the examination of differences. Examination is the combination of observed hierarchy and normalizing judgment. It involves using visibility to exercise power. What is visible is the objectified subject, as (s)he fits or does not in a particular context. Using internalized norms to examine others in a given hierarchical context obscures the
power of discipline. A subject’s “describable individuality” is thus “a means of control” (Foucault 1997:191). In this way, examination introduces individuality of experience into the field of documentation.

Foucault constructed power as regulatory controls on the body (Foucault 1980), but these are also “a condition of possibility for the constitution of the subject” (Oksala 2005). Foucault described power as “a complex strategical situation” (Foucault 1980:93). This power is not authoritarian, although it is, by nature, repressive. This is a subtle form of power that operates by categorizing individuals socially. People are “put into discourse” (Foucault 1980:11) through classification and examination (Oksala 2005) in the context of the socio-cultural system. This form of power is experienced through subjects’ relationships with others. It permeates everyday life to the extent that subjects, created through categorization and definition, internalize and thus normalize the norms of this categorization. This approach is perhaps a bit too structural, in the sense of power as an imposing force, because it does not satisfactorily account for the power that the subject has.

Leacock (1983) also focuses on relations of power, as is typical of the feminist studies that draw attention to the role of capitalist production in socially constructed difference. She writes about power as cross-cut by certain types of socially difference, such as when gender intersects with class and/or ethnicity. It is therefore important to realize that people live out their lives in various and changing sources and forms of power. This is perhaps especially evident during rural transitions to adulthood and in the issue of rural youth out-migration, but even within community is multi-vocality.
Practice

Moving toward a more flexible approach to the relationship between structure and agency is an approach that emphasizes practice. By field, Bourdieu means the particular social settings (Erickson 1996), in which people compete for various forms of capital (Bourdieu 1989). Bourdieu’s idea of the field positions social actors according to economic, social, and cultural capital (Anheier et al. 1995). Economic capital includes financial assets (Bourdieu 1986); cultural capital includes the dispositions acquired through enculturation (Bourdieu 1984); and social capital is the potential mobilization of network resources (Anheier et al. 1995). Of these, it is cultural capital that marks differences between classes (Bourdieu 1984) because it is this form of capital upon which the others are based, though disparities exist across all three forms. Together these determine one's position in a social field according to the volume and composition of capital one possesses (Anheier et al. 1995).

Cultural capital is, for Bourdieu, an explanatory concept underlying Weber’s (2007) class-based status groups (Hall 1992). Habitus is “the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations” (Bourdieu 1989:78) upon which cultural capital is based. It is the semi-learned grammar of practice, not easily defined, but which reinforces norms. Habitus is more than a set of rules. It is the performance requirement of subjects as they adapt to changing situations and contexts and a process wherein subjects strategize as they experience various obligatory moments. Habitus is also primarily class-based. It is largely determined by family background and education, which are both greatly shaped by class. Habitus is what people use to
strategize in different fields of power, but it can be limiting. It is not easily adaptable to rapidly changing contexts because of its thoroughly engrained nature.

Habitus can thus be characterized as taste, which functions "as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place,' guiding the occupants of a given...social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position" (Bourdieu 1984:466). Thus habitus is reproduced in an apparently mechanistic way in the process of acquiring one's own culture. Thus, compelling as Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital is, it leaves very little room for “the flux of cultural distinctions” (Hall 1992:273). This is a problem of Bourdieu’s theoretical position between “objectivist structuralism and subjective constructionism” leaving him unable to account for the complexity of socially constructed difference (Crawshaw 2004:227).

Bourdieu (1984) suggests that a possible solution to the problem of mechanistic reproduction of the social structure, is to abandon the idea of a single socially constructed objective reality (i.e. class) and instead posit situational and contextual socially constructed differences, within a view of culture as the diverse configurations of institutionalized meanings and objects strategically used by agents in particular social arenas. Such an approach maintains the primacy of class in shaping culture, while also recognizing other important areas of socially constructed difference.
Agency

Agency operates as subjects negotiate different situations based on their internalization of norms, which reflect their social positioning. “Pure agency,” which “would encompass independently conceived aims, individual motivation, independent action and imperviousness to possible effects,” is not possible (Parker 2005:8). Nor is “free agency” (Ortner 2006:145) possible, because subjects have internalized norms. Even performances that seem contrary to the norms have the discursive ability to reinforce them, if only as a point of reference.

The view of agency as “the exercise of free will against the oppressions or constraints of social structures and cultural hegemonics” (Durham 2008:151), counterposes the individual to society, culture, and other people. This is the sort of agency Hall and Jefferson (1991) found among British youth participants in subculture and counterculture. Through various group memberships Hall and Jefferson saw these youth as asserting their self-interest against cultural hegemonies, particularly of class (Durham 2008). But when agency is an assumed counterpoint to power, important questions are raised including: who has the power and how is it expressed (Foucault 1980) but also what kind of agency do people have, how have they come by it, how do they use it, and how does their agency connect them to others (Durham 2008) in particular social fields.

Power defines the subject by defining the context in which the subject can be understood. Agency, therefore, is constructed in the specific cultural and historical context of power, but power enacted on the subject is not the same as that which the
subject wields (Butler 1997). Subjects live with uncertainty as the fields in which they operate shift. This has the effect of creating “a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions” (Foucault 1980:33). Both Butler (1997) and Oksala (2006) build upon Foucault’s assertion that agency exists within the contextual limits of power and that norms are only reproduced through people enacting them. Although they each take different paths in explaining agency, they both arrive back at the assertion that agency can only exist within the confines of normative limits.

For Butler, the psyche explains agency (Butler 1997). According to Butler, the constitution of the subject requires a realization of the separate self from the social, specifically the significant others who care for us in our earliest years. Butler describes a sense of loss resulting from this realization, which she says is ameliorated by the internalized norms of society. For Butler, subjects are willing to be subjugated by norms of society simply because they are constructed as psyches. She borrows from Nietzsche and Deleuze in describing a “will to power.” This is the creative aspect of the psyche, the one that interprets norms. Agency is possible because the internalization of norms distinguishes one subject from another. By taking up the power of our separateness we are free to vary our normative performances and to express agency, which is an effect of our subordination, especially at the margins of society.

For Oksala (2005), it is not the psyche, but rather the lived experience of the body that explains agency. According to Oksala, the lived body explains agency and,
more specifically, why people take up certain subject positions. This cannot be explained by the psychic process by which pre-personal beings are turned into subjects, but only by the conditions of possibility for particular forms of the subject. For this, Oksala turns to Merleau-Ponty. Like Foucault, Merleau-Ponty recognized that norms are historically constituted. These norms cannot, however, be fixed or completely disciplined in the body, because the experience of the body, rooted in perception, is as ongoing as is our consciousness of our relation to the world. Oksala’s main critique of Butler is that using the will to power concept to explain agency does not explain why subjects would take up certain positions and not others. Thus Oksala argues that the experience of the lived body, not the psyche, is the condition for agency, although the experiences of the body are also rooted in perception.

The fields of norms within which we contextualize our world constitute our agency and this must necessarily be constituted within changing experiences. One way to think about the ongoing nature of agency is with the idea of the "vital conjuncture" (Johnson-Hanks 2002). This approach gets to the heart of how agents fluidly and strategically negotiate structure (Cole 2008). This approach accommodates the “indeterminacy and innovation” with which agents move through life stages (Johnson-Hanks 2002:865). The "vital conjuncture" is at once a manifestation of “recurring systematicness and contexts of unique possibility and future orientation” (Johnson-Hanks 2002:872), not simply a site where internalized norms are enacted. With this approach it becomes possible to analyze individuals’ hopes and plans as they relate to structuring institutions (Cole 2008). This approach
taps into the strategic and specific nature of agents' negotiation of particular fields. It
frames socially constructed differences not as single statuses within social systems,
but multiple, distinct, and processual (Johnson-Hanks 2002). This approach to
agency, as simultaneously and strategically undertaken in local and larger fields, helps
to distinguish between the varied forms agency can take.

*Resistance, Reworking, Resilience and Rural Youth*

In resisting, subjects transgress norms and exploit the politics of agency. Like
agency, subjects undertake resistance as they negotiate the context of power. Again
like agency, resistance can only operate in the context of power because power is the
center from which resistance cannot be completely external (Foucault 1980). And
again, like agency, resistance can come in many forms, including its outright form, but
also in the form of reworking and resilience.

Resistance, as a pointed form of agency, involves "invocation of an oppositional
consciousness" in an "explicitly oppositional" way (Katz 2004:251). It is this
oppositional quality that leaves resistance dependent upon people's adoption of
awareness shaping ideologies and practices. Outright resistance is rare. There are
some notable exceptions, of course, including the ongoing Occupy Movement and the
World Trade Organization protests, but generally speaking more subtle forms of
resistance, reworking and resilience, are more common.

"The practices of reworking are those that alter the conditions of people's
existence to enable more workable lives and create more viable terrains of practice"
Reworking implies a successful adaptation to changing or challenging circumstances. Transnational migration (Orellana et al. 2001; Ragazzi 2001) exemplifies reworking, as does leaving one's place of origin in order to access certain educational opportunities. In these forms of reworking, youth embody late modernity's dominant educational norms and norms of centralized capital and opportunity (Corbett 2007), so that they can access more viable fields of practice.

Rural U.S. youth often respond to globalization with a form of reworking that includes both migration and education. Carr and Kefalas (2009) describe such strategies among youth from a small Iowa town that has an aging population and declining extractive industries. They distinguish between leavers, who highly value encounters with diversity and learning about the world, and the stayers and returners, who may see a certain excitement in the outside world, but have no desire to trade what they know and understand for something less certain.

Carr and Kefalas (2009) go on to identify reworking strategies of youth specific to class background, which are also evident in patterns of migration. They write of achievers, those who leave in pursuit of university education, having been encouraged to do so by teachers and parents. Achievers, groomed for college and professional life, are the "equivalent of homegrown aristocracy" who “get the message that it is their fate, indeed their duty, to leave" (Carr and Kefalas 2009:19,31). As achievers engage in strategic reworking through migration and education, they access larger fields of practice, which provide more opportunities to acquire and utilize cultural capital.
Carr and Kefalas (2009) also write about *seekers*, who leave their rural community because they feel specifically compelled to do so, but do not have the financial means to pursue university education. Within this group there are those who enlist in the military and those who undertake community college or vocational or technical training. Those who otherwise leave, try to find a job in a new place, and "make it" there, might also be included in this *seeker* category. *Seekers* rework their fields of practice through migration, and, in the case of relatively less prestigious post-secondary opportunities, education.

Hecht (1998) describes a case of reworking in which youth remove themselves from their households and communities to live as street children in northeast Brazil. These are children living on the margins of society in order to transform the realities of their existence, and fully recognize their marginal place in the local context, made worse by neoliberal globalization. In leaving home street children reject the structures that have marginalized their households and rendered them invisible, and in so doing reclaim their visibility in the street. In each of these examples of youth reworking features strategic (re)alignment. What differs, are the fields of practice and what capital one has access to.

Communities do something quite similar. In the Pacific Northwestern U.S., for example, timber-dependent communities rework the conditions of their existence by confronting the faulty notion of nature as commodity (Purdham 2004) with sustainable-yield forest management (Hibbard and Elias 1993) and various other green industries. "New West" (Winkler et al. 2007; Robbins 2009) communities similarly
attempt to rework their situation in response to neoliberal globalization when they invest in tourism, developing accommodations, restaurants, entertainment, or protecting the natural landscape. Rural places with access to metro areas (via road and air), with an educated workforce, and some in-migration, may especially reap the rewards of protecting some of their lands. Doing so may help them to be competitive in the global economy and attract high-end service industries (Rasker et al. 2004).

Resilience differs from reworking, in that it does not necessarily imply successful adaptation to the changing or otherwise challenging circumstances in which one finds oneself. Resilience is a form of resistance defined as seeing oneself and acting differently in the face of changing circumstances (Katz 2004). It is the invocation of practices that negotiate "the very edges of the contradiction between new and old formulations of everyday life" (Katz 2004:245).

Today "economic productivity has shifted to the production of human capital" and education has come to be seen as the key to success in the labor market (Wintersberger 2005:207). As a result, youth often see themselves more so as students than as laborers. They may also see themselves as preparing for the field of labor in their future. These are predominantly youth of relative privilege, who are not critically necessary at present for household economic viability, and therefore have the luxury of not having to perform an economically valuable role in the household.

Youth of relatively less privilege often demonstrate resilience in the performance a combination of roles, such as those of laborer and student. Resilience, in such cases, involves straddling distinct fields of practice. This is the case for the
Bolivian boys working in mines, who work not only to support their household, but also to pay for the uniforms necessary to go to school (Davidson and Ladkani 2006). Others, like Haitian child domestics (Kramer 2001), may see themselves as aspiring students, even if they are unable to attain the goal. This is resilience in the form of economic contribution to household alongside internalization, and perhaps performance, of the educational norms characteristic of modern childhood. These youth, although they may see themselves and act as both laborer and student, are often deskilled by the very dual-strategy by which they demonstrate resilience. As a result, they are ill prepared for the futures they are likely to face, although they are quite aware of globalization’s supposed opportunities for both education and new forms of consumption.

Youth and Class

To study youth, as a cultural construct, is to reveal much about political economy, because the place and value of youth in society reflects the way that society accomplishes the labor of material production and the way it organizes its members. Ideas about youth are therefore closely related to ideas about the family, which changed as the realms of economic production and the home became more distinct (Ariés 1962). Zelizer (1985, 2005) writes about another historically recent, and vastly implicating, shift in the cultural construction of youth. Through the nineteenth century, children remained important sources of labor for the household, both in the home and for wages. This was the era of the economically valuable child. At the turn
of the twentieth century, as the middle-class grew and it became possible to support a household with adult labor only, children's economic value declined and new norms of family and education emerged. As the economic value of children declined, the emotional value of children especially, grew so much so that they came to be understood as "priceless." This distinctly modern view of childhood is such that they should be a time for education, play, and perhaps allowance for household chores, but not wage labor. This particular cultural construction spread by means of newspapers, compulsory education, and child labor laws and has held fast since the turn of the twentieth century, arguably expanding in significance to include today's prolonged transition to adulthood.

With the emergence of youth as a cultural construct, comes the tendency to view it as a future-focused phenomenon. The tendency is to emphasize life stages as universal in their order and character, from infancy through childhood into adolescence and beyond. This emphasis on process is helpful, "but it also inevitably frames young people primarily as not-yet-finished human beings" (Bucholtz 2003:3; Hogan 1986). The foundational ethnographies by Mead (1928) and Malinowski (1987) have this flaw. They approach subjects from the perspective of adulthood, emphasizing the transition to adulthood, rather than youth-centered cultural practice (Bucholtz 2002).

Arnett (2004) emphasizes both the transition to adulthood and youth-centered cultural practice in his writings about emerging adulthood. This is a life stage generally thought to persist from the late teens through the twenties. Emerging
adulthood is freer than adolescence, particularly from parental control. At the same time emerging adulthood is not quite "young adulthood" because these young people do not feel they have achieved the newly culturally defined criteria of adulthood. This emergent life phase is derived from the need people have to participate in the modern reflexive project of self (Giddens 1991) or the need to "find oneself" (Bellah et al. 1996) in the context of increasingly competitive social and economic sectors, in which emerging adults strategize.

Emerging adulthood is a distinct and relatively new social category which is distinct both from adolescence and adulthood. Up until about the 1980s youth took a fairly straight path into adulthood. The first stop was college, some training, or the military. Next up was a job. Marriage followed, and then children. Between marriage and kids, the new family bought a home. All of this was accomplished by age twenty-five—and often in that order (Settersten and Ray 2010:ix).

Today that transition to adulthood looks somewhat different. Some of the same progress markers exist, but they are no longer as likely to occur so soon after completing high school, nor in the same strict order. Moreover, each is likely to be subject to strategic experimentation. The markers of adulthood have also changed somewhat, and now incorporate more tacit and reflexive dimensions, including taking responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett 2004), the last three of which are perhaps not so different from what young people did in earlier decades.

The transition to adulthood does not happen in a vacuum. One of the things that shapes it is place. The place where one grows up can influence the timing and
paths through the transition to adulthood. "The type of community young adults grow up in shapes the availability of educational institutions, potential marriage partners, housing, and occupational and career possibilities" (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999:80). The transition to adulthood, in this increasingly open yet unequal society, is furthermore, shaped by class within certain locations.

The influence of class in this process is evident even in adolescence. Eckert (1989) found in her study of a suburban high school, that while youths' basic social groups--the jocks and the burnouts--were essentially class-based, the class of one's parents did not necessarily dictate one's own membership as a jock or a burnout. These are class reference points have many different names—athletes, preppies, or the popular kids, and loners, druggies, or outcasts. Many names aside, the concepts are nevertheless widely understood in the U.S., in part because of their prominence in popular culture, particularly film and television. There are a vast number of, often unnamed, groups in between the two extremes of the adolescent social hierarchy. Adolescents at the top of the hierarchy, if they are seen to have earned their place there, as opposed to inheriting it, demonstrate reworking in accessing a high status field of practice. Adolescents in the middle, meanwhile, demonstrate resilience with regard to their social position when they refer to the extremes of the hierarchy in defining their own position.

Following adolescence, the same general pattern persists. Emerging adults are assessed, largely on a class basis. Settersten and Ray (2010) write about two class-based paths along which individuals transition to adulthood in the U.S. today, of
which one is generally much longer than the other. They refer to those individuals taking the longer path to adulthood as *swimmers*. They are the emerging adults who take their time in the transition to adulthood and do so in "careful and calculated ways" by getting additional (often college) education, thoroughly considering their career options and usually postponing getting married and having kids "until they get their lives in order" (Settersten and Ray 2010:xii). Taking the long route into adulthood, particularly by way of a college education, *swimmers* tend to become financially independent from parents gradually. The college student might have moved out of her/his parents' house and work or have loans to cover his living and educational expenses, but as the popular idea of "Dear Dad, send money" attests, *swimmers* can often count on their parents financial assistance when it is needed. *Swimmers* also have the luxury of "job-shopping," (Settersten and Ray 2010) trying out different kinds of work and workplaces as an adaptive response to the need to find oneself.

Individuals who take the shorter path to adulthood, called *treaders* "have embraced the responsibilities of adulthood too quickly, without being adequately prepared for today's competitive world" (Settersten and Ray 2010:xii). They may have children or marry at a younger age than their *swimmer* counterparts and may not be financially able, academically prepared, or interested in pursuing post-secondary education, particularly college. Missing out on this particular form of post-secondary education and training is probably the biggest of several disadvantages for *treaders*. And to be sure, there are others. For instance, *treaders' parents may not be able to
lend occasional (let alone regular) financial support to their emerging adult children. They may therefore have to proceed from high school directly into the workforce and cease to have, or be comfortable accepting, financial support from parents. While "job-shopping" helps *swimmers* to find out what suits them in a professional sense, especially what work they find most meaningful, the "job-hopping" of *treaders* is demonstrative of "the collision between their ambitions and reality" (Settersten and Ray 2010:xiii,67). *Treaders* change jobs because they need to if they are going to get by.

*Treaders* are nevertheless subjected to dominant norms characteristic of the *swimmer's* transition to adulthood, particularly those of self-exploration. *Treaders* may nevertheless perform a distinctly local function in doing the sort of social labor (i.e. embodying local norms and values) that reproduces communities. Overall *swimmers* have much more opportunity to undertake identity exploration than do *treaders*. But this does not mean that *treaders* do not also have a desire to undertake such exploration. They might simply be too busy with the demands of providing for self and family to pursue it in the same ways that *swimmers* do. The problem for society comes when the *treaders* outnumber the *swimmers* as they do today, indicating that a larger percentage of the population is not being set up to achieve culturally defined markers of success (Settersten and Ray 2010). Here we can see that the difference between *swimmers* and *treaders* is essentially one of class. The slower transition to adulthood is an opportunity mostly only afforded to youth of relative privilege, while the quicker transition is undertaken mostly by youth of relative less-
privilege. This is a trend that Settersten and Ray (2010) address, but it is an idea that could still be more critically interrogated, particularly in looking at the status implications of particular pathways within these broadly classed trends.

As youth experience various forms of socially constructed difference, like those of age, class, gender, race, and ethnicity, they "develop specific socio-spatial identities connected to their access to resources and position in the structure of the community" (Corbett 2009:1). The lens of class has been particularly popular in the study of youth. This is an approach typified by studies from the UK, especially those emerging from the Birmingham School. In this approach youth tends to be viewed as a site of cultural reproduction, but with a healthy dose of class theory.

Willis's (1977) work on youth culture recognized class dynamics and tried but did not clearly emphasize a capacity for change. Willis did not presume class to be something simply imposed from the outside, but rather the combined experiences of relationships and structural constraints. Class was, however, a singular social outcome, thus working kids got working class jobs. Willis is correct in that youth can be a site of cultural reproduction, even class cultural reproduction, but it can also be a site of agency and resistance. In not accounting for multiple social outcomes Willis's work largely fails to interrogate the relationship between structure and agency. In this way, although their topics and approaches were different, both Willis and Bourdieu construct subjects largely as vessels for class habitus (Bourdieu 1985), emphasizing practice but with insufficient variability.

Hall and Jefferson (1991) take a similar approach in their study of expressive
forms, among British youth subcultures in the post-World War II era. Like Willis (1977), Hall and Jefferson (1991) begin with a Marxist assumption that access to production is unequal and that this results in struggle. Hall and Jefferson saw the groups they studied as subcultures, doubly articulated with regard to class and age. They describe how subcultures share certain things with their "parent" cultures, which are class-based. Through particular stylistic expressions such as dress, music, and appropriation of commercial culture, youth subcultures embody their collective identity and the concerns thereof, thus reflecting the values of the parent culture.

If, as Willis (1977) and Hall and Jefferson (1991) found, working class culture exists as a sphere of youth cultural practice, it stands to reason that other types of membership could be expressed in many other fields as well, not only at work, school and leisure, but in expressive forms, such as dress and music. For this, the dialectical communicative action concept is useful (Habermas 1981). This is a theory that begins with an understanding of Marx and his class concept centered on labor (Marx and Engels 1970). Where it differs from Marx, is in the type of labor in question. For Marx, this was material production labor. For Habermas, this was labor increasingly employed in the service of communicating, such as is undertaken in the reflexive performance of the project of self. In studies of youth and class then, "labor" should be broadly construed to include communicative labor in the "social factory of everyday life and in 'nonproductive' cultural institutions such as schools, media, and families" while "class" should be construed as one of many "situational speech performances" (Foley 1989:147,153), something that exists only in dialectical terms.
The differences in the cultural practices of youth of relatively more and less privilege are both political-economic and socio-cultural. *Swimmers* and *treaders* both undertake the transition to adulthood in the context of a world rapidly changing as a result of neoliberal globalization, but with different results. Interestingly, both *swimmers* and *treaders* share ways of explaining success and failure in this increasingly competitive world. They do so with the myth of meritocracy, the idea that success is the result of hard work and talents, not entitlement. And yet, "without exclusion or protectionism and within a context that emphasizes individual talents and work, elites are still able to reproduce their position for their children" (Khan 2011:40). In other words, through obfuscation meritocracy maintains inequality, no longer called entitlement, but privilege, something is said to be earned. This is what makes privilege distinct from entitlement. This is an obfuscation of what is nevertheless inherited advantage built on ascription, not achievement.

There are three lessons of privilege, identified by Khan (2009) in an elite residential U.S. high school, which are also apparent in other contexts. Such lessons are essentially habitus. The first lesson is that hierarchies are like ladders, they are meant to be climbed. Since the only barrier to success is lack of hard work or ability, then hierarchies must not be barriers that keep some people at a disadvantage while paving the way for others. They must rather, be evidence that some people chose not to work as hard as did others. The second lesson of privilege is that since success is supposedly something that is achieved, it cannot be ascribed. Moreover, it must be
cultivated through experience, especially the experiences offered through educational institutions. The third and final lesson of privilege is that one demonstrates it through ease. This means the embodiment of certain "interactional knowledge" (Khan 2011:71), in the strategic negotiation of social position. The goal in embodying ease, is to be comfortable and competent with across different social contexts.

Alongside ideas about how people succeed, are ideas about how they fail. Increasingly, success is marked through consumerism, including the idea of paying for a top-quality post-secondary education. This is quite the cultural shift. Youth as a whole are no longer seen as a social investment, as they once were, but rather "viewed either as consumers, on the one hand, or as troubling, reckless, and dangerous persons on the other" (Giroux 2009:3), as "going somewhere" or "getting stuck." Under the influence of neoliberal globalization's "market fundamentalism and new authoritarianism" (Giroux 2009:3), some youth receive credit for their own success, while other youth, and the parents and communities that raised them, are blamed for failing.
Chapter Two: Methods

In this chapter I will unpack the concepts and theories relating to my methods of data collection and analysis, with particular attention to the power dynamics these imply. I open with a discussion of power dynamics in anthropological research as they evolved through the history of the discipline. I then briefly discuss my own positionality with regard to the people and place of Talltown. I go on to discuss my sample, including how I identified participants and how I made contact with them. Next I discuss my specific data collection methods, including observation and participant observation, photovoice and semi-structured interview. I then discuss my methods of qualitative data analysis. Throughout this chapter, I incorporate a reflexive discussion of my experience with these methods and the degree to which they successfully moderated the power dynamics between my research self and my informants.

I give particular attention in this chapter to best practices regarding the study of youth and holding the broad and the specific in equally sharp focus. Ethnography is “a term referring to a constellation of holistic, qualitative methods ranging across participant observation, in-depth interviews, the use of key informants, photography and filming, and document or artifact analysis” (Clark 2011:42). The sampling techniques and methods of data collection and analysis in this study are similarly broad in order to facilitate understanding of differences in the social positions available to Talltown youth and differences in their cultural performance.
Power Dynamics in Research

Categories of socially constructed difference, like class, gender, or ethnicity, are relational concepts that only make sense in context with others, like, age, at local and supra-local levels. Subjects socially constructed as different perform their roles as they can and see fit, with regard to these various relational concepts and social positions. It is the distinctiveness of others that allows us to interrogate our own shared norms and ideas (Marcus and Fischer 1986). This suggests that culture is a “series of processes that construct, reconstruct, and dismantle cultural materials in response to identifiable determinants” (Smith 1984: 481) thus allowing a reconciliation of macro- and micro-analytical approaches and placing socially constructed difference within a single dialectical system of structure and agency. One such "identifiable determinant" which must be acknowledged in successful ethnographic research, is the researcher herself. A successful qualitative fieldworker therefore frequently reflects "on their role in the [youth]-adult power structure, anticipating issues that might arise and planning for the role they will play in the future" (Clark 2011:48).

How am I Perceived Here?

Before entering a field site and then on an ongoing basis we should ask ourselves, "How am I perceived here?" Answering this question can help us to acknowledge and interrogate our own cultural perspectives and better understand how these affect our reception in the field. This is imperative in building rapport, especially in studies of youth. Participant observation and other data collection
strategies require "a certain amount of...impression management" (Bernard 1995:137). It raises "a straightforward question: How does one go about being artful when assuming so obvious a role?" (Wolcott 2005:80) It may seem contradictory that we might utilize impression management in an effort to minimize impression management in another, but this is what is required to establish rapport. Fortunately there are tools to help keep us honest about our own cultural bias and our positions of power as researchers. We should be rigorously honest and critical of our own cultural perspectives and how these affect our reception in the field. In doing so we may avoid naive realism and resist the temptation to assume that others understand things in the same ways we do. Failure to do so leaves us culturally fenced in and unable to understand what we observe and learn within its own cultural context. So before digging into this chapter further, let me first pause to reflect on my own positionality and how I believe I was perceived in Talltown.

Some of my personal qualities are immediately evident, visible and marked by our society. But some personal qualities, equally important parts of who I am, are not immediately apparent. Both types of personal qualities can influence power dynamics in ethnographic research. Generally speaking, the more immediately obvious personal qualities are those on which people base their initial perceptions of us. The less apparent qualities also shape others' perceptions of us, but these only rise to the surface with time and interaction, such as can evolve in sustained or regular participant observation and even within an interview.
First Impressions

Those of my personal qualities that are immediately apparent shaped my initial introductions to people. These are the criteria by which people decide who I am and how they ought to interact with me. Chief among these qualities are that I am a Caucasian woman and relatively young, at least in comparison to the rather middle-aged population of Talltown. In general I think all of these statuses were mostly advantageous. I think perhaps my gender identity served me well in this study of Talltown youth cultural practice. A man might have had a more difficult time conducting this study. It is still culturally more acceptable for a woman to be interested in research about youth, just as it is still more acceptable for women to undertake jobs working with youth. This was also helpful with regard to contacting emerging adults, men in particular. As I was "fresh meat" in the Talltown emerging adult social scene, if only superficially and temporarily, emerging adult men seemed only too pleased to speak with me. Although emerging adult women can be rather distrustful of and competitive toward one another, perhaps especially in a place like Talltown, with its small population and limited number of eligible dating partners, I did not feel that the emerging adult women of Talltown were particularly disinclined to talk with me.

My Caucasian status, I believe, had a slightly greater impact on my relations with people in the field. The racial and ethnic demographics of Talltown are such that most people there are Caucasian. So with the majority of the local population I fit in this regard. My racial and ethnic background thus went mostly unmarked in the field,
fitted as it is to people's expectations. In this way, being Caucasian conferred somewhat of an advantage in the field, paving the way for me to interact with locals without the burden of having to first acknowledge (perhaps even explain) my racial and ethnic background. But Caucasians are not alone in Talltown. There are a number of racial and ethnic backgrounds represented in the Talltown area population, notably Hispanic and American Indian.

Interactions between Talltown's racial and ethnic minorities and its Caucasians are shaped by the individuals' previous experiences with people of other racial or ethnic identities. I asked all of my interviewees to self-identify their racial or ethnic background. I also asked them about the prevalence of intolerance and discrimination in Talltown. Some Caucasians, like Collin a lifelong Talltown resident college student in his early twenties from a well-off professional family and Mark an autoworker in his late teens, assured me that Talltown is not a discriminatory place. This tendency to downplay racial and ethnic difference was also a benefit to me with regard to my Caucasian status. One might expect that those persons who did have some personal experience being discriminated against would be the most reluctant to open up to me as a Caucasian researcher. Often my status as an anthropologist (and my associated explanations about my interest in diverse experiences) seemed to offset any disadvantage conferred by the difference in racial and ethnic backgrounds, at least in casual conversation, participant observation and interview settings.

Still, there are some ways that my Caucasian status was disadvantageous and did represent a limitation. Were I of a Hispanic background, I would undoubtedly have
related differently to my Hispanic interviewees, and they to me. Perhaps they would have spoken more freely about prejudice and discrimination had I not been Caucasian. But even when Hispanic interviewees and informants seem to have been skirting around issues of race and ethnicity, or practicing image management with me, I am still given pause to reflect on the power dynamics that inform such interactions.

As soon as I introduced myself to people, or as soon as they read about me in the local paper, I was known as a graduate student. This was also an advantageous status to have in Talltown because of the community's emphasis on higher education in its socialization of youth. Teachers often asked me to talk to their class about college and my plans after that. And in general I believe this status made a good first impression in Talltown by showing that I too had followed the middle-class path through higher education— the most privileged path in Talltown ideology, as we shall see. But in another way my educational status was disadvantageous, in that it set me apart from some residents, especially those emerging adults who stay after high school.

Where I'm From

Two other of my personal qualities, which shaped how the people of Talltown perceived me, are less immediately apparent. I spent most of my growing up years in a suburban area of the second largest city in my Midwest State. There were stores open 24 hours, a mall and lots of other youth entertainment options like bowling, roller skating, arcades, movie theaters and lots of restaurants at which to socialize at greater distance from parents and other authority figures. This is a rather different
experience than I would have had in Talltown, where there are fewer unsupervised
opportunities, especially for youth without their own transportation.

There were lots of extra curricular activities to choose from in my suburban
schools, competitive in middle school and high school. Besides student government
and the usual sports there were musical and dance groups, scholastic teams, and
multiple theatrical productions per year. The Talltown youth experience, while
touching on the same events, is of a smaller scale. There are fewer schools nearby
with which to compete in events and travel between schools that are nearby is costly,
both in time and fuel. Some Talltown youth have these things. Some do not. Based
on my own suburban school background, I in some ways saw Talltown youth as
having fewer opportunities than I did and as having to overcome this in their
embodiment of educational norms in larger fields.

Mixed Methods

I have chosen to use a combination of data collection methods for this study,
which are complementary in scope, and can be used to triangulate emergent findings.
Prior to this study I familiarized myself with a wealth of data on Talltown, in the form
of field notes, interview transcripts, maps, and photographs compiled by ethnographic
field school participants. I was responsible for coding much of this material and thus
became well acquainted with it. In the field, I used participant observation in order to
steep myself in community level relations. I also used targeted interviews to collect
individual level data, through which I could look for patterns between individuals, as
they might fit certain groups or categories. I also used photovoice, a rather more abstract method, by which the participants could confirm or contradict what I believed to be the emergent themes of interviews and participant observation.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Generally speaking anthropologists use pseudonyms, as I have done, to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of their informants and their communities. Such measures are obviously necessary when the topic of study is a sensitive or private issue, but even when the research topic is seemingly mundane, confidentiality is important. No matter what the topic of study, some informants may still share things with the researcher that they would not want to be traced back to themselves. Confidentiality is of particular concern in small rural communities like Talltown, where the vast majority of people know the vast majority of others upon whom they are socially and often economically dependent. In order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of Talltown and its people, I refer to both the place and individuals with pseudonyms. I have also omitted or altered certain identifying details. As part of this effort, sources for community demographic data or similar identifying data, which would give away the true identity of the community, have not been cited.

IRB

I anticipated some challenges in obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my research. I knew that by including minors my research protocol was
subject to additional scrutiny. So I met with an IRB administrator well in advance of my protocol submission to talk through potential issues, the idea being that I could address them before they held me up. While I still feel this was a generally good idea, I did still experience difficulty in obtaining the approval of my IRB reviewer. In particular, my reviewer had problems with my plans for recruiting minor participants and the photovoice portion of my study.

**Protocol Problems**

With regard to recruitment, the reviewer wished for me to contact parents and obtain their permission prior to contacting their minor children about participating. I took issue with this and saw it as an affront to the agency of my minor informants. To start anywhere but with the minors themselves would be to deny their ability to self-select for this research. Were I to begin recruiting with parents, it might be possible for a parent to pressure their minor child into participating, regardless of whether or not the child wanted to.

By starting with the potential participants themselves and doing short presentations in their classrooms, I gave my minor participants full authority as to whether or not they wanted to participate. If they were interested in participating, they were given a consent document to take home to their parents, which they could then read and sign, along with an open invitation for their parents to contact me if they had questions or concerns. This approach worked well as both parents and their children are accustomed to having consent documents sent home and returned to the school.
By starting with the minors I left room for individuals to decide for themselves; a child could not be pressured into participating by their parents. Fortunately, when I elaborated this point in my revised protocol the reviewer had no further objection to my proposed minor participant recruitment strategy.

The reviewer's other area of concern, with which I took issue, was the regarding the photovoice portion of my study. Initially, my IRB reviewer took issue with my plan to have youth informants be photographers in and around their community. The reviewer was particularly uneasy about minors taking pictures, potentially of other minors, and about how these photographs could be used. Although I had outlined in my protocol the specific and detailed ways in which I would train the minor photographers to minimize risk to themselves and others, the IRB reviewer initially did not think it appropriate for minors to be involved in this part of my research. In resolving this issue I owe many thanks to the IRB administrator who spoke on my behalf to the reviewer and explained to him that this was an element of my protocol central to my larger research goals. Youth of legal age were far more likely to have moved on to college or other opportunities in other locations and so were not an ideal group to participate in the photovoice portion of my research. Simply put, it would have been extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible to utilize the photovoice method without involving minors.

I would have shared the IRB reviewer's concern regarding how the photovoice images could be used, if I had planned to have my participants use digital technology in capturing photographs. It would have been very difficult if not impossible to ensure
that none of the images captured for this research were posted without authorization on social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. But I had anticipated that this would be a concern for the school administration and board and so I included in my original research protocol that the youth photographers would be using single-use cameras. These would be returned to me and screened, first by myself and then by the principal. And still the reviewer expressed concerns about the photovoice portion of my research. After more discussion with the IRB administrator, 3 months after I submitted my original protocol, in what was my second full month in the field, the reviewer approved my research.

Impact of the IRB Process

Part of the problem I faced obtaining IRB approval was that the IRB Office was working with less than a full staff of reviewers. Four of their usual reviewers were out on leave from reviewing protocol at the time mine was being reviewed. As there were fewer reviewers reviewing the usual number of protocols, the turn around time per protocol was longer than was usual. The pressure of this increased workload was evident in that the IRB Office regularly had to follow up with or check in with my reviewer, even after the ten-day recommended reviewing period had passed. Given that the reviewer usually responded with "I'm not done with it yet," it was clear that the increased workload contributed to the delays I experienced.

The other major obstacle I encountered in the IRB process was that the reviewer did not share my understanding of youth agency. He proposed changes to
my protocol which I felt would have diminished, even ignored my minor subjects' agency. Fortunately I was able to hold my ground, thanks in large part to the support of a knowledgeable IRB administrator. Still, as so often happens in the field, things could not then go entirely according to plan. I had to make in-field adjustments, primarily surrounding the photovoice portion of my study. As a result of the IRB approval delays I ended up undertaking the participant observation, photovoice, and interview phases of my study concurrently, rather than successively, as I would have liked.

The delay presented certain challenges. I had only four months to spend in the field before I had to be back at my university to teach. As the reviewer continued to be delayed in providing feedback and eventually approval, the time in which I could conduct my research grew short. Most seriously impacted was the photovoice portion. Once the participants were finally able to begin, winter had come and it was increasingly difficult for them to get out and about to take photographs, let alone be motivated to do so in the cold. Of the eight photovoice participants, four took zero photographs. Of these three, two were nevertheless present for the photovoice focus group. I opted to include them even without having taken any photographs because I wanted to talk with them about the photovoice process as it had played out in this case. I also believed that with the abstract approach I would now have to take in the photovoice focus group, they could contribute just as much as those who had taken photographs. The photovoice portion of my study was very different from what I had planned. I collected far fewer photographs that I could have under different
circumstances, such as having more time or the option of using digital cameras. The photovoice focus group was productive despite the delays and the limited number of photographs that resulted. It yielded information that helped me to better understand Talltown youth experiences and views. Still, having had to do so much in-field adjustment for the photovoice portion of the study, particularly a more abstract approach in the focus group, my results became all the more dependent on my ability to conduct quality interviews.

Six of those who had signed up to participate in photovoice ended up participating in the focus group. I had planned to ask participants to reflect on the image they liked best and the one they thought was most powerful. I also planned to ask them to reflect broadly on what the images showed. Using this mnemonic I planned to ask participants, "What do you see here?," "What is really happening?," "How does this relate to our lives?," "Why does this problem or strength exist?," and "What can we do about it?" (Wang et al. 2004:912). Having no photographs developed at the time of the focus group, it made little sense to proceed with my original focus group plan, so while in the field, I devised a new photovoice focus group guide. (See Appendix A Photovoice Focus Group Question Guide) Having six participants who were nevertheless present and ready to talk with me, I had to devise a new plan. I started by asking each participant in turn to reflect on the single most important thing that they wanted to convey in the pictures they took, had planned to take, or would take if had more time. I did this for each of the three photographic themes: youth life, community assets, and community challenges. After eliciting
responses as to the single most important thing conveyed per theme, I asked the participants to tell me about other things they thought were important for me to take away from the photovoice phase of the study. At this point, participants began to engage each other in conversation and led me through a discussion of how certain Talltown features, such as its relative geographic isolation, were at once assets and challenges, thus adding a level of complexity to my understanding of the lived experiences and cultural practices of Talltown youth.

Sample

The sample for this study includes the (n = 8) individuals who participated in the Photovoice portion of the study, those who participated as interviewees (n = 61), and many more who were valuable informants as I engaged in participant observation, but who were not participants in other portions of the study. It is difficult to put a number on those who were informants in participant observation but did not participate in other ways. Included in this group are adolescents, emerging adults, teachers, parents, and other community members. These informants, while numerically not represented in my sample, do appear in the pages that follow, where they are given pseudonyms, just like the other participants. Others also inform my findings though they are not represented in the sample here. These are the people who speak through the interview and field note data, collected by ethnographic field school participants, collected over the course of three summers, which I coded in NVivo. Especially noteworthy are the community leaders who gave introductory talks to field school participants, in which
they often spoke of the locally perceived youth-out-migration problem. These talks in particular, have been essential to this study in what they reveal about dominant community discourse.

In total I conducted 61 interviews. Because all ideas about age categories are social constructs, disseminated through institutions in particular cultural and historical contexts (Wyn and White 1997) it is important when designing a sample to specify what is meant in the use of particular terminology. (See Table 1 Interviews) Most of the interviews I conducted were with youth. Included in this portion of the sample are adolescents (n = 14) or those between the ages of 13 and 18, but still in high school and emerging adults (n = 32) or those between the ages of those out of high school through age 35. The age cutoff I use for emerging adults is somewhat older than what is typical in the literature, because Talltown's population is somewhat older on than the national average. Simply put, in a relatively old community, people remain young for longer and are considered youth up to age 35.

The interviews with emerging adults took place both in Talltown and elsewhere. Interviews with those currently residing in Talltown typically took place in an office at the local high school, which I had been given permission to use, or at the individual's home or other location in which they felt comfortable. Interviews with those currently living elsewhere, occurred wherever the interviewee lived, whether it be a permanent location or temporary home away at college. Many of these were college students at Oregon State University, though there were others to whom I traveled to interview at other in state colleges. A few more were college graduates currently residing and
working in Portland, Oregon.

Lastly included in the sample are people who work with or have worked with youth in Talltown (n = 15). All of those who work/have worked with youth were residing in Talltown at the time of the interview. Of the interviewees working with youth, 10 are also emerging adults and were asked questions not only about their work with local youth, but their experiences as emerging adults in Talltown. With this sample I sought to authentically represent Talltown youth voices, while also capturing the dominant community discourse in which they sound.

Table 1. Interviews

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adolescents</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emerging Adults</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Works with Talltown Youth</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are many characteristics and experiences that should be sampled for within these age-based sample populations. So in both of the youth and adult sample groups a wide range of characteristics and experiences were sought. These were not criteria of exclusion from participation in my study, but rather criteria designed to help me collect data across various categories of socially constructed difference. To begin with I tried to sample equally by gender. (See Table 2 Age & Gender) Although I did
not specifically ask informants to identify their sex or gender, based on embodied masculine and feminine characteristics and style and based on the individuals’ given names, 40 of participants were women and 21 were men. Included here are only those individuals who were interviewees or photovoice participants. Not reflected in these numbers are key informants I engaged with in the course of participant observation. Through participant observation I was able to achieve greater representation for young men than the sample numbers would seem to indicate.

Table 2. Age & Gender

|      | 13yrs | 14yrs | 15yrs | 16yrs | 17yrs | 18yrs | 19yrs | 20yrs | 21yrs | 22yrs | 23yrs | 24yrs | 25yrs | 26yrs | 27yrs | 28yrs | 29yrs | 30yrs | 31yrs | 32yrs | 33yrs | 34yrs | 35yrs | 36yrs+ |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Men  | 1     | 1     | 2     | 5     | 1     | 1     | 2     | 1     | 1     | 2     | 2     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 2     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 1     |
| Women| 1     | 5     | 2     | 3     | 1     | 1     | 3     | 1     | 1     | 2     | 2     | 3     | 1     | 2     | 3     | 2     | 1     | 1     | 4     |      |      |      |
or ethnic groups, I did take advantage of opportunities to include such individuals in my sample, in particular several individuals who reported a mixed-background including American Indian heritage and one Pacific Islander.

**Table 3. Race & Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
<td>45 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial/Ethnic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Reported</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To gauge interviewees' social class background, I asked them to tell me about the socioeconomic status of their household of origin, and their present household if they were not adolescents. I asked them to envision checking a box—upper-, middle-, or lower-class—on a survey. (See Table 4 Class Background) It is significant that all but seven of the interviewees specified middle-class. Of those seven, one teenager from a business-owning family stated that she was of an upper-class household, the other six all indicated a lower-class household. The sample is mostly representative of the middle-class, but as this is a widely varied phenomenon in itself, I also asked interviewees who identified middle-class households, to specify yet again, whether
that is upper-, middle-, or lower-middle-class. As expected, middle-middle proved the most popular response.

Table 4. Class Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Background</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper-Class</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-Class</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-Class</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In pursuit of more information to contextualize interviewees' responses to the idea of marking their household socioeconomic status on a survey, I also inquired about educational attainment and the type of work that interviewees and their parents do or did. In cases where I was unfamiliar with the type of work an interviewee referred to, I often specifically asked about required education or training for such work. Often I could reasonably ascertain whether or not an interviewee or their parents went to college based on my knowledge of the type of work they are doing today, though I also asked specifically about people's educational attainment.

In most cases, I have only the words of the interviewee and my subjective evaluation of the interview process, with which to draw conclusions about the interviewee's class background. Interestingly, no one I interviewed said they wished to refrain from identifying the class background of their households. One emerging adult said he did not wish to self identify a racial or ethnic background, but did not
hesitate in saying that his households of origin and current households is middle-class.

In some cases, I can confirm elements of a particular interview through my own observations of interviewees or their family members at work in Talltown. Being that Talltown is a small town, as I got to know youth and their families, I began to notice them more out and at work in the community. In some other cases, I also have data collected from others, especially siblings and friends of a particular interviewee. In one memorable instance of the discursive power of middle-class identity, I had two Hispanic sisters, who share both parents, describe their parents' work very differently. Maria and Sofia's family has been migrating in a circular fashion between Talltown and another Western state. Maria is in her mid-teens and a student in high school. Sofia is in her early twenties, has some online college credit, and works in food service in Talltown. Sofia said, "My dad is a ranch hand and my mom works for a janitorial service." This is not how Maria described things. Maria said her dad is a "ranch hand" and her mom "works at a bank," which is probably technically true, though Maria did not hint at the janitorial part of the job. Maria, apparently, felt the situation of our interview called for more image management, specifically about class background, than did Sofia, perhaps because she is still in high school, where adolescents readily and regularly impose status upon themselves and each other.

Time in residence in Talltown was another key sampling factor. I sampled for people who were born and raised in Talltown, some going away to college and returning, as well as people who had moved into Talltown at some point in their lives. I also sampled for people with vast extended families in Talltown, people with some
extended relatives in Talltown, and people with no extended family in Talltown. These two factors were designed to help me see patterns in the lived experience of those with relatively large and small Talltown social networks and those with Talltown social networks that are more or less kin-based. Among the adolescents I also specifically sampled for those who are involved in extra curricular activities and those who are not, in order to better understand both those oriented toward the school and those oriented away from it. Lastly, among the emerging adults I sampled for those currently residing in Talltown and those currently residing elsewhere in order to pursue similarities and differences between those of relatively more and less orientation toward Talltown. (See Table 5 Current Place of Residence)

**Table 5. Current Place of Residence**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently resides in Talltown</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently resides elsewhere</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 14 interviewees currently residing someplace other than Talltown, 4 had settled more or less permanently in another location for reasons other than schooling. The remaining 10 of these were away at college.
Sampling Technique

Identifying individuals for the youth and working with youth sample groups required somewhat different sampling techniques. To locate youth interviewees I gave presentations in classes of 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th graders. These presentations were partly another way for me to give something of myself to the school. The Principal and teachers had expressed to me how nice it would be for the students to hear about college from a real life college student. And so I agreed to visit classrooms to talk briefly about my college experience, in particular what anthropology is and how I came to it, the decision to pursue graduate education and my plans for work in the future. Also in these presentations I was able to introduce my study in some detail. I wanted these potential informants to understand what I was doing (i.e. trying to understand what life is like for rural youth and their tendency toward out-migration) and why I was doing it (i.e. how it fit in with my graduate education). As there are not very many specifically youth-oriented organizations and activities outside of the schools, there was a convenience sample of teachers and coaches at the local middle and high school, which turned into a snowball sample. Through the references teachers gave, I was able to identify additional interviewees who work with Talltown youth.

Owing to Internal Review Board requirements, the sampling of youth was somewhat more complicated. Youth under the age of 18 were not approached individually, but recruited through short presentations about the study given in the classroom. Fortunately, as the schools in Talltown are rather small, it was fairly easy
to inform students about the study and extend an invitation to them to participate. Presentations were given in classes which all students take (namely English and Social Studies) in 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade. Students who wished to participate in the study were given an assent document to sign and a consent document to take home for their parent or guardian to sign.

Youth over the age of 18 were a bit harder to locate. I began by introducing myself to people I encountered about town, on the street, at their places of employment or in various public social settings, and asking them if they had interest in helping me with my study. Using a purposive snowball sampling technique these individuals then referred me to other youth to fit the wide range of characteristics and experiences I sought.

Looking back at the collection of individuals that made up my sample, I wish I had interviewed more equal numbers of men and women. Among the adolescents I wish I had interviewed more young men in their early teens. Among the emerging adults I wish I had interviewed people who had left Talltown for reasons other than post-secondary education or training and people who are unemployed. I also wish I could have interviewed some Hispanic former residents of Talltown.

Through participant observation I also regularly interacted with a number of other people, who also made important contributions to my understanding of Talltown youth cultural practice. These key informants have been extended the same courtesy as interview and photovoice participants. Identifying personal details have been obscured and pseudonyms given.
Observation and Participant Observation

Participant observation is "is a strategy that facilitates data collection in the field" (Wolcott 2005:81). More specifically, it is “a form of unstructured observation over time in which the researcher interacts socially with those observed” (Clark 2011:42). Participant observation is therefore interactive and involved and can help us manage our assumptions and reactions. "What counts in fieldwork is what is going on in your mind" (Wolcott 2005:83). Through participant observation a researcher engages with local life experiences “in a manner that invites empathy and openness on the part of the investigator” (Clark 2011:45).

“Given the holistic, unstructured, and interactive nature of participant observation, it goes without saying that the fieldworker should be someone with the proclivity to enter into a socially intricate and ambiguous undertaking. Good participant observers have a knack for openness, tentativeness, and breadth of insight. Good fieldworkers are socially intelligent and also reflexive about social interaction” (Clark 2011:46). Participant observation helps the ethnographer to avoid hastily made judgments, “instead entailing (in its prototypical use) prolonged involvement in the field, and a discover process that evolves rather than calcifies” (Clark 2011:45). In this way participant observation, "the foundation of cultural anthropology" (Bernard 1995:136), lets us both broaden our scope and sharpen our focus.

Under participant observation the researcher is the student and the informant is the teacher. It is in this way that the power dynamics of participant observation differ so drastically from those of interview methods. When researchers utilize interview
methods, they develop questions that emerge from a base knowledge about their particular place or people of study. But what is there to suggest that this base knowledge is accurate or complete? Often researchers develop interview questions based on nothing but their knowledge of scholarly literature. Nowhere in this process is the researcher a student, except perhaps as a student of other researchers. By contrast, participant observation empowers informants to teach researchers what is important and meaningful. With such an insider-originating knowledge base, the researcher can then develop more effective questions for use later in the study. This is precisely the advantage my previous experience in the ethnographic field school conferred. This and my opening of the study with participant observation made me confident that I had obtained a thoroughly emic understanding, enough to know how to ask questions from my questionnaires (See Appendix B Interview Guides) in the subsequent interview portion of the study.

Participant observation is an anthropologist's bread and butter, but strict observation is also useful, especially among youth. Both methods position the researcher to consider youth "within a dynamic social environment, with close-at-hand scrutiny of [their] roles as social actors" (Clark: 2011:42). Strict observation is similar to participant observation except that the researcher is not interacting socially with those being observed. Both of these observational strategies lend themselves well to the study of youth because “both forms ably focus on [youths’] experiences, inasmuch as observation provides a direct view of [youth] in action” (Clark 2011:44). Conducted in naturalistic settings these observational strategies bring to the fore the
dynamic and processual performance of roles in context. In identifying these Talltown contexts, we can see that much socialization occurs within distinctly different social groups. Working to do participant observation and identify interview and photovoice participants across this diverse range of groups is therefore imperative to the collection of data on the cultural practice of these groups.

I observed without participation in classrooms and to a lesser degree at school extra curricular activities. In classrooms where I had not worked out a volunteer role with the teacher, I was strictly an observer. These early observations were helpful in a number of different ways. As class sizes in Talltown schools are small, there were many chances for me to learn and be reminded of particular students' names. Strict observation in classrooms, especially where I was seated near the back and the students were facing the front, allowed me to note things like student dress and posture and behavior in class without much notice by the students. Later on, it was easier for me to establish rapport with these same students because they had not been put off by acutely feeling my observation of them. Observation in classrooms also gave me a good sense of what the student-teacher relationships are like in Talltown, especially how particular students tended to act in the presence of authority figures.

I found other opportunities to observe during extra curricular activities. In one sense I was at times a strict observer in these events, such as when I opted to sit high in the bleachers and apart from the mass of youth in the front rows and take notes. But even then I was a participant in that I paid my admission to the event and cheered along with the rest of the crowd. Other times I sat in the midst of the mass of youth
spectators and did not take notes, but later recorded my recollections of the event. My time spent in the field corresponded with the fall sports, when football, volleyball and soccer are being played. Toward the end of my time in the field, winter sports were beginning, of which basketball was apparently the most popular.

And so I began my fieldwork with participant observation of and among many more individuals than are represented in my interviewee and photovoice samples. As I sought ways to learn more about the Talltown community (its socio-political organization, economic system and cultural norms) and the about youth cultural practices and their socially constructed positions I engaged in participant observation with both adults and youth in the Talltown community because of the range of people and socio-cultural factors I wanted to understand. Some of these individuals would go on to be interviewees or photovoice participants. Others did not, but were nevertheless valuable informants and among the most instructive teachers I had in the field.

It was easiest to do participant observation among youth in whose classes I had a formalized volunteer role. Youth no longer in high school were more difficult to engage in participant observation, compared to their counterparts still in middle or high school. Middle and high school youth were in school from just before 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. each weekday and many more spent additional hours at the school to participate in and/or observe athletics and some other extra curricular activities. Once I became aware of this time breakdown it was clear that the most opportunities to observe and/or participate with middle and high school age youth would be found at the
Fortunately the school administration, board and teachers were all very welcoming and accommodating of my need to access students in the schools. Once I had passed a background check I was approved to be a volunteer in the school and to help out wherever I could get involved and make myself useful. I wanted to contribute somehow in the schools in order to show my gratitude for being allowed to spend time in the schools, observing, participating, interviewing and working with my photovoice participants. The Principal informed me that most volunteers work directly with teachers to see what they can do to help out, but since I did not yet know the teachers, this was somewhat of a challenge. After a bit more discussion with the Principal I learned that there would be an after school tutoring program starting partway into the school year and that there was also a Study Skills class during school hours in which I could assist the teacher by working one-on-one with students on their Geometry, Algebra, English, Physical Sciences, Health and other coursework. Helping out in this way certainly helped me to establish rapport with people working with youth, including those who were 35 years of age or younger and thus also still youth themselves.

Helping out in classrooms also helped me to establish rapport with certain students, though this required skill and flexibility on my part. Youth in the United States are often treated by adults in ways that are dismissive, even punitive. Youth experience and thus come to expect such treatment. It is therefore a challenge for an ethnographer to “circumvent the hazards of stacked power relations” between oneself
and the youth informants (Clark 2011:50). The ethnographer’s goal then, is to leave intact the youth’s role, “while carving out a distinctly exceptional, softened role for the grown researcher” that is both youth-friendly and not controlling of the youth informants (Clark 2011:51).

It was sometimes a challenge to leave the youth's role intact while I participated and observed in Talltown classrooms. Several of the young men with whom I interacted most in the classroom, regularly tested my potential as an authority figure. They had many ways of trying to provoke a response. Sometimes they would allow me to see them fiddling with their cell phones in class. Other times they would allow me to witness them teasing classmates or cracking jokes (often silently) behind the teacher's back or blatantly avoiding doing their schoolwork. One young man regularly confessed (to the point of bragging) about not having done his homework. Another seemed to test how easily they could draw me into an argument and began to rant about the current political administration, smirking all the while, which I interpreted to be a test of my political allegiance. In another instance, when the teacher had momentarily left the classroom, one of the young men--older, very outgoing, jocular and popular--got up, announced he was done with his work and so was going to leave the classroom for moment. (I assume he was headed for the room across the hall where he liked to pop over and socialize amidst the chaos of the art class.) He then said he would tell the teacher I had given him permission to leave. Recognizing the test I raised my eyebrows, smiled a little and replied that I in no way had authority to grant him permission to leave the classroom so if he left, he was on his own with the
consequences. In general I took the position that I was not an authority figure and unless I saw someone being harmed physically or emotionally I would not intervene.

During my earliest and shortest trip to Talltown, in 2008, and repeatedly while I was there in 2010, I heard it said that there is "nothing for young people to do in Talltown" and that this leads some youth to be "troubled" and thus choosing to do things like drink alcohol and use drugs. This was then said to cause youth to get "stuck in a rut" in Talltown at great risk of getting in and then being "trouble." These youth, I was told, are the most likely to stay after high school. If in fact the emerging adults who were doing the most "partying" as adolescents, and if they are most likely to stay in Talltown after high school, then it stood to reason that I ought to try and seek out some of these now emerging adults in the Talltown bars. I knew from previous experience that I could not depend on the personal references of people working with youth to get the snowball rolling. I had not experienced people working with youth as being likely to point me to "stuck," "troubled," or "trouble" youth. Bars (or clubs or pubs, depending on where you are) are one place where youth go to meet, mix and mingle, that is to socialize. Such places are also popularly defined as places where one might meet a romantic partner. Thus, the Talltown bars might draw a number of different people for a number of different purposes.

Among those who did not look upon all the bars as equally corrupting places to spend one's time, there was a belief that the local bars drew different crowds. Beth, a high school dropout now in her mid-twenties, called them the "crack heads," "townies," and "pipeliners," which is the name given to workers on the natural gas
pipeline that is being constructed in the region, who have recently swelled the Talltown population, if temporarily. Such distinctions mark each establishment as different in terms of the social ends it provided access to. The "townie" bar, for instance, is especially popular among those emerging adults who have left Talltown, but have returned for a visit, especially when it coincides with a special occasion like a holiday or a wedding. The "crack head" bar, was supposedly the place for the hardest of the former adolescent "partiers." The "pipeliner" bar meanwhile, was seen as a place for Talltown's single emerging adult women to meet men and thus not a place that Talltown's emerging adult men or groups of mixed-gender of Talltown youth would often frequent. At the "townie" bar in particular, Talltown residents socialize across a fairly wide age-range. In one memorable example of this, I spent an evening with three late-middle age women—one was there unwinding after a tough day working as a bartender at the "pipeliner" bar and the others were there celebrating one of their birthdays—and two international cowboys for hire who were both in their thirties. On this same occasion some "pipeliners" I had met came into the "townie" bar and though they were certainly not run out of the place, they did sit at their own table not interacting with others in the bar. This stood out to me in stark contrast to the way the locals were relating to each other in that setting. In paying attention to the similarities and differences in Talltown’s observable social settings, I was better able to imagine the range of my purposive sample characteristics.
Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory data collection method. It is "an innovative methodology that puts cameras in the hands of...constituents who seldom have access to those who make decisions over their lives" (Wang et al. 1996:1391). I chose to use photovoice for its empowerment qualities. Photovoice is participatory in that it asks informants to first take photographs and then to think about them and talk about them with the researcher. This is an important tactical quality for any study of youth given that youth "meanings do not, and will not, map neatly onto adult meanings" (Clark 2011:53). In photovoice, as in participant observation, informants are clearly positioned as the experts, who will teach the ethnographer what is important to know and do about a given situation.

Knowing that I wanted to proceed with photovoice, I had to decide with whom I should proceed. I wanted to begin this phase of the study earlier in the year than I ended up doing. Had I been able to begin as early as planned I could have included (and indeed, would like to have included) college-youth that were home in Talltown for the summer. Their photographic perspectives on Talltown could have been very interesting alongside those of the adolescents. I would also have liked to have included as photovoice informants, youth out of high school, but not in college and still living in Talltown. These youth, however, were not immediately accessible (at least not sufficiently for my timeline). As I became more familiar with these youth, I found that many of them had lives that were already very busy, owing to obligations to work and family. As a result the majority of post-high school Talltown-residing youth
were simply too busy to be photovoice participants. What I needed were youth living in Talltown who had some time on their hands, something I later realized was rather rare in Talltown and something I initially thought I might find in high school students.

Following the suggestion of school administration I recruited photovoice informants through a senior social studies class. I began by introducing myself to the class and made a short presentation about anthropology and my research. I left a sign up sheet with their teacher and after a couple of days, nine people had signed up to be photovoice participants. Of these, there were three males and six females, all were White/Caucasian, eight were or had been participants in extra-curricular activities and six worked a part-time job.

The next step was to talk more with the photovoice informants about the research plan and about basic research ethics. Finding a time when everyone was free to participate in the training was difficult. As has already been noted, most of my photovoice participants had extra-curricular and work obligations. I could have scheduled a couple of different meetings, but it was important to me that my photovoice participants develop, from the start, a sense of themselves as a group. So I decided to hold our orientation and training session during lunch one day. I made arrangements to use the Senior Government classroom (while the teacher was elsewhere) for the session because it was familiar to all of the photovoice participants. Thinking it would serve as an added incentive for the participants to show up for the session, I also provided lunch and took orders for Subway one day in advance.

The day of the orientation and training session arrived and two of my photovoice
participants (both female) were absent. In addition, one of the male participants decided just before lunch that he would rather skip the session and spend the time with his girlfriend, who was not a participant. At this point my photovoice group was down to just six participants. Fortunately, the two who had been absent from school contacted me the next day to say they still wanted to participate and so I arranged to do an additional orientation and training session with them, bringing my photovoice participant group back up to eight.

Both of these orientation and training sessions followed the same basic itinerary. I began by recapping what photovoice is and why I was using it. I told them that photovoice is a research method in which members of a community take pictures and then talk about them in order to teach the researcher about the concerns of the participants. I also told them that the pictures they would take could then be used to help bring their concerns to the attention of those with the power to do something about them.

The next item on the agenda was the ground rules for participation in photovoice. The basic idea here was that participants should first do no harm. This meant they should not take pictures that could get individuals (including themselves) in trouble with the law, with the school, with parents or with peers. Participants were encouraged, however, if they had such a photograph in their mind, which they felt was important to take, to work with me on ways to capture the idea safely. Another restriction regarding picture taking was a school rule regarding use of cell phones, including camera phones, in school. The Principal, however, understood the problem
this presented, and reassured me that if my photovoice participants wanted to take pictures of something in school, they or I should simply talk to him about it first. The last of the ground rules were practical. Participants were told to take as many pictures as they could and to take notes about the content of each photograph and what they were thinking as they took the pictures.

The next agenda item dealt with how participants were to go about obtaining permission to take photographs. Participants were not required to obtain permission from building or property owners prior to taking photographs because I had already posted fliers and given an interview for the local paper in order to notify the community that some of their young people would be out and about taking photographs. For any photographs in which a particular person was identifiable, participants were told to first introduce themselves and the project and then have the person(s) to be photographed sign a release. Participants were also told that no person should be photographed who did not wish to be photographed. On a related note, if a person was willing to be photographed, but did not want to sign a release, then no photograph of them should be taken.

The next agenda items related to the three broad themes around which participants should compose their photographs. These were youth life, community assets, and community challenges. Regarding youth life, I asked the participants to consider what Talltown youth do and where, how, and why they do what they do. For the community assets theme, participants were asked to consider what is good about the Talltown area, what is good about the Talltown community, resources available to
people in the community and resources available to the town. Lastly, regarding the community challenges theme, participants were asked to consider what is not so good about the Talltown area and community, what people in the Talltown area need and what would make the Talltown area and community better. For each of these three broad themes, the participants were encouraged not to limit themselves with the guiding considerations I had given.

The last agenda item for the photovoice orientation and training session was the timeline. Originally I had wanted my participants to have at least one week during which they would have one single-use camera with which to take pictures for one of the three themes. Once all the pictures were taken, the plan was for photovoice informants to have a focus group in which they would view and discuss the photographs. This discussion, along with what I had learned through participant observation, would then guide me in the process of constructing and phrasing interview questions. And as an added bonus, those images that emerged in the focus group as particularly important could be used as a probing tool in interviews. Owing to the mere two months of field time that remained after I obtained IRB approval and the fact that I had to conduct different phases of my study concurrently, I was unable to use any of the photovoice images as probes in subsequent interviews.

*Interview*

Having taken the time to allow my participant observation and photovoice experience to inform my thinking and shape my lines of inquiry in the field, I was
ready to undertake the last phase of data collection, the interview phase. Since this was the final phase of the study, I was unlikely to have opportunities to interview people more than once. In cases such as this, it is best to conduct semi-structured interviewing, using a "freewheeling quality" with an interview guide, or a "written list of questions and topics that need to be covered" (Bernard 1995:209). Using this style of interview allowed me the flexibility to follow thematic leads as the interview progressed, while still making sure to cover all of the topics and issues I had interested in.

Interviewees selected the location for their interviews. They were free to suggest anywhere they (and the parents or guardians in the case of minors) were most comfortable. Many of the interviewees preferred to come to me and so their interviews were conducted at a round table in a small room off of the main office of Talltown High School. Others wished for the interviews to be done in their homes or in the case of those working with youth, their offices or classrooms. Still others wanted to meet in some third location, such as in a private study room in the library of their college or in a coffee shop or restaurant.

All interviews are subject to discursive cultural variation, but when an adult interviews youth, these variations may be particularly pronounced. Clark (2011) outlines a few strategies that can be used to overcome potential miscommunication between youth interviewees and adult researchers. In the interview setting, before delving into the main interview topic, it is a good idea to just chat with the youth interviewee. Doing so helps the youth interviewee to see that the interviewer has
genuine interest in them and what they have to say. Topics for pre-interview chatting might include family, activities the youth enjoys, or recent school events.

As with any interview, it is important to be sensitive to the needs of the interviewee. When interviewing youth it is particularly important that there be privacy from adults in positions of authority, people like parents and teachers (Clark 2011). The ethnographic interview may be foreign to some interviewees, especially youth, so it is a good idea to explain things before getting started. It is particularly important to emphasize that the youth interviewee is the one who has the answers, the one who has something to teach the interviewer (Clark 2011).

Overall I think the questions I devised were effective. Some interviewees, like mid-twenties college student Tom and mid-teens Earl, easily took off from my questions and led me into discussion of related cases and cultural knowledge. Occasionally an interviewee like Collin, an early-twenties college student, would not launch into discussion in the course of answering my questions. In Collin's case, answers themselves were also rather short. Interviews like Collin's prompted me to feel that a question was not getting at the information I desired. In such cases I usually found a very good reason for the difficulty. For example, I sometimes found I felt awkward asking people to self-identify in terms of race/ethnicity, apparently awkward enough that I apparently forgot to ask a number of the teachers I interviewed early on. On a couple of occasions this was a rightly justified feeling. I had experienced this question to be a bit awkward for some interviewees, having seen some of them mask the awkwardness with a joking manner of answering with
something like, "plain ol' white" or giving a short rather nervous laugh after answering. Occasionally an interviewee, like middle school student Ellen, was confused and did not know what I was asking. Thus Ellen asked, "Does it mean like, what color I am?" These were nevertheless productive moments in fieldwork, because in each instance my discomfort called me to be aware of how my own racial/ethnic background conferred advantage. Other times the difficulty called me to reconsider how I had phrased a question so as to better speak to and from the experiences of my interviewees.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

My analytical approach to this data is to minimize assumptions about the topic and data, "using simultaneous data collection and analysis to inform each other," so to be open to different interpretations of data (Charmaz 2008a:155). This is an emergent approach, a grounded theory approach, and one of the great strengths of ethnography.

Grounded theory entails developing increasingly abstract ideas about research participants' meanings, actions and worlds and seeking specific data to fill out, refine and check the emerging conceptual categories...[which] results in an analytic interpretation of participant's worlds and of the processes constituting how these worlds are constructed. (Charmaz 2008b:204)

In this way the grounded theory approach helps to broaden our view while sharpening our focus. It also helps us to "elucidate this facet of postmodern understanding without claiming to be more than partial" (Clarke 2003:571). Each youth voice I describe is regarded as a standpoint, a place from which analysis sets out, "rather than a definitive description of empirical phenomena embodied in the words that [youth]
speak" (James 2007:269).

As a qualitative researcher I distinguish between analysis and interpretation. "All research has to be acknowledged as a process of representation" (James 2007:268). We take in data and put it into our own words. Analysis implies a sense of objectivity. "If there is a "there" out there, and it can be counted or measured and reported within limits of accuracy generally acceptable to all. That gives to analysis a certain undeniability" (Wolcott 2005:17). Interpretation is different. Interpretation involves a rigorous reflexive subjectivity. Still, "there is no ideal ratio of description to analysis to interpretation. The relative emphasis devoted to each depends on what one wants to accomplish" (Wolcott 2005:183). I wanted to learn about Talltown youth cultural practice in order to understand how the transition to adulthood and rural restructuring intersect and inform youth decisions about where and how to make their future lives. So I needed stories and recollections and also answers to more direct questions about different social positions and experiences in Talltown.

Through participant observation, photovoice and interview, I collected data at the level of the individual, in the form of interview notes and transcripts. Detailed field notes document my participant observation. The photovoice phase is documented with field notes and a transcribed focus group. Interviews were transcribed, wherever possible. (In only 3 cases did participants not wish to be recorded and there were no cases where interview recordings were lost due to equipment failure or human error.) Transcribing accomplishes two things. It prioritizes the authenticity of the voice of the interviewee, with attention to how
interviewees communicate what they mean. It also prepares the data for thematic coding, which I did, and by which important patterns of meaning emerge.

Participant observation and photovoice also provide data at the group level, in the form of conversations and other interactions amongst locals and between locals and myself. This is the most reflexively demanding portion of this particular study. Owing to this demand, analysis is concurrent with data collection. Because "simply being in the field is not enough to make "everything" fieldwork" because "the essence of fieldwork is revealed by intent rather than by location" (Wolcott 2005: 57-8), analysis is part of fieldwork. The intent of this fieldwork is to collect themes from the field, code them for manageable analysis and use them to interpret the cultural practice and social relations of Talltown youth.
Chapter Three: Rural Findings

What is Rural?

Talltown is a rural place, but what exactly does that mean? Is it the size or density of a community that makes it rural? It is the landscape or geography? Do its economic strategies make it rural? Do the customs and pastimes and social organization of people make a place rural? What about the population size or location? "Giving a place a particular characteristic by naming it suggests how people and institutions act toward it" (Flora and Flora 2008:7). This chapter explores how locals, both youth and adults, understand Talltown as a place and a community, and the related norms that dominate Talltown discourse. As will then become clear in the following chapter, it is in this context that the youth of Talltown come to understand that they are ascribed particular social processes and statuses and within which they strategically practice their culture.

Place vs. Community

In my observation there are two kinds of local talk about Talltown shared by youth and adults. The first is about Talltown as a place. In talk about Talltown as a place, people emphasize its location, landscape, and the economic side of life there. In the second kind of talk about Talltown, people emphasize community, especially interpersonal relationships of residents. Together these ways of talking about place and community form the basis of Talltown local cultural knowledge and constitute the
norms that dominate community discourse.

*Landscape and Geography*

The county in which Talltown is located is very sparsely populated. It has a population density of approximately one person per square mile. The city of Talltown is situated in a valley shrouded by a mountain range in a high desert region. It is a rather diverse landscape, including forest, rangeland, and alkali lakes. One of the first things I learned during my time in Talltown was that locals generally hold the Talltown area landscape in high regard. Mark, who is an automotive employee in his early twenties who is planning to enter the military, said, "We call it God's Country." Jose, a Hispanic student at Talltown High School in his late teens, used these same terms, "God's country," as did Lori, an entrepreneur from a long-established Talltown area family who is in her early twenties. Such comments reflect the discursive norm of appreciation of the Talltown landscape.

Talltown community discourse also reveals the norm of outdoor recreation and entertainment. Residents describe a tremendous range of outdoor activities, including hunting, shooting, fishing, camping, hiking, walking, horseback riding, biking, swimming, sledding, skiing, snowboarding, and 4-wheeling, to name some, though certainly not all of outdoor activities possible in the area. As Mark, a mechanic in his early twenties, said, in the Talltown area you can do "really anything" outdoors.

Talltown is a rather isolated place, geographically speaking. It is about 15 miles north of the nearest small town, an unincorporated community of less than 200 people.
About 45 miles to the west of Talltown is another neighboring small town, which is also unincorporated and has a population of less than 500 people. To the east of Talltown, about 30 miles, is another unincorporated community of scattered ranches with a population of around 100 people. To the north of Talltown, about 45 miles is the only other incorporated city in the county, which has a population of around 250 people.

Talltown's relative geographic isolation does have some practical drawbacks. That which is talked about most is the distance that Talltown residents must travel for certain goods and services. None of the small towns neighboring Talltown are sites of resources or services that Talltown does not already have. So for things that can only be had in population centers larger than Talltown, there are three options. The first option is to drive nearly 100 miles west to a city of approximately 20,000 people in a neighboring county. Residents of the Talltown area typically go to this city for big stocking-up shopping trips at big box stores, often for groceries, but also for other household necessities. This reflects the community norm of affordably provisioning one's household, which owing to the distances traveled in the process, requires a certain amount of planning ahead. High school junior Brandi and teacher Heather, talked about the necessity of making lists in planning ahead, and of making regular trips out of town to stock up. In between trips, Brandi said, you "live with what you have." The second option for procuring goods or services outside of Talltown is to drive 175 miles north to a city in another neighboring county with a metro population of approximately 170,000 people. Talltown area residents travel to this for several
reasons, such as to have medical procedures not offered at the local county hospital and to visit shopping malls, often dining out as part of the trip. When talking about traveling to this city to the north for purposes of shopping, Talltown residents reveal a discursive norm of consumerism, at least for those with the financial means to participate in it. The third city, to which Talltown residents often travel, is a city of approximately 220,500 people that is 225 miles away in a neighboring state. Travel to this city is particularly important for ranchers, who travel there to buy and sell cattle.

Collin, a lifelong resident of Talltown in his early twenties who is now a college student, noted another drawback to Talltown's relative geographic isolation. He said, "If you wanna, in like a [high school] sport, go compete or just go travel, the closest semi-large city is... an hour and 45 minutes away." Student athletes can at least socialize or do homework on the long bus rides to games and meets, but Talltown's distance from more urban centers is even more of drawback when one wants to shop. Megan and Stephanie, both mothers in their late twenties living in the Talltown area, talked about the distance as an inconvenience. Megan, in particular, noted the difficulty of this travel in winter months, "when we're snowed in." In our consumer society, people are increasingly apt to show who they are by what they buy. This presents Talltown residents with a challenge. They can either shop locally, paying higher prices and choosing from more limited selections, and support local businesses, or they can access increasing consumer choices by traveling out of town to shop, or by shopping online.

"Isolation is part of the rural image" (Flora and Flora 2008:9). In Talltown this
can be both physical and socio-cultural. Derek, a mid-twenties lifelong resident (except for his time in college) who works with Talltown youth noted a negative consequence of this relative isolation when he said, "They don't get exposed to a lot of different types of people." Dane, a lifelong resident of the Talltown area and an automotive worker in his early twenties said something similar, "You're kind out of the world here. You don't really get what the world is." This, people like Derek concluded, could contribute to a "narrow base" with which youth judge ideas, the world and people, including themselves. In the worst-case scenarios, this view contributes to what people variously called "intolerance" of or "discrimination" against different racial and ethnic groups, non-heterosexuals and people of different gender identities.

This relative geographic isolation, particularly from interstates and places that might be called urban centers or areas of suburban sprawl, again reflects the discursive norm of appreciation for Talltown's comparatively undisturbed and pristine landscape, but it also reflects the discursive norm of Talltown is a "safe" place. One participant in the photovoice focus group described going atop one of the highest hills to take a picture of the surroundings. He said, "There was just nothing... there's the town and there's West Side and then nothing." He and his fellow participants went on to discuss how this can be a positive thing for Talltown youth in that it provides some measure of protection from negative external influence, particularly from more urban problems, including things like "gangs." Stephanie, a mother and beautician in her late twenties, spoke of the safety of Talltown as specifically relating to the lack of gang activity and
lesser drug problems than in big cities. She said, "You don't have the gangs. I mean there's drugs but not like in the big cities that you hear about in the schools and stuff."

Eduardo also echoed the idea that Talltown is a safe place with specific mention of the lack of gangs. He said,

In big towns you know, there's that whole thing about gangs and stuff and since it's such a big town they get like, involved in it and rival gangs and stuff like that. And here, well there really isn't that, anything here. Like, I came from [a city of 20,000] and it's a little bigger than Talltown, but still there's a lot of gangs over there. Like, at least poser kids tryin' to be, tryin' to make their own gangs and stuff over there. And then when you come here it's like, a lot different 'cause there's not a very many Latinos here and stuff like that. There isn't much of like, gangsters you could say. It's just a whole different thing here.

Eduardo identifies the specifically un-safe phenomenon of gangs, particularly those of Latino/Hispanic membership, but also various other forms of supposedly morally corrupting influences.

Demographics

According to the most recent U.S. census, there are approximately 2,300 people living in Talltown today. This is a slightly smaller population than Talltown has had historically. But given that Talltown's largest population was only ever about 2,500, this decline has not been drastic. The reasons for Talltown's population decline are reasons shared with other rural communities. The biggest of these is that industries that once employed larger portions of the population have declined (something that will be discussed in a subsequent section) leading people to seek work elsewhere.

Taking the long view, Native Americans were the first residents of the Talltown
area. Early in the 19th century European traders, explorers and military expeditions arrived. For a time the area was populated by Basque and Irish sheepherders. Today the Basque legacy is mostly historic. The Native American legacy is much diminished also, excluding educational cultural events led by Native American elders of the region, which are periodically held at the local library and the presence of artifacts on loan from a Native American woman and on display at a local restaurant and bar.

The Irish legacy, by contrast, persists and continues to be an important factor in locals' sense of identity. Mark, a local mechanic in his early twenties, for instance, replied to my inquiry about how he would indicate his racial or ethnic background on an official form by saying, "Irish is what I would say." Mark has even recorded his cell phone voicemail message in his impression of an Irish accent, which he also took up in our phone conversations prior to our interview. By the time of our in-person meeting and interview, however, Mark had dropped the accent. In Talltown today there are a number of large cattle ranches owned and operated by large families of Irish-descent. Matt, who is in his late-twenties works with youth, said, "The town itself is mostly Irish Catholics and so a lot of the people here still have a Catholic background to them." Outside of ranching, the primary institution through which Talltown Catholics congregate is the local Catholic Church.

Talltown today is not a place of tremendous racial or ethnic diversity. The population today is predominately Caucasian. According to the most recent U.S. census the population is approximately 91% Caucasian and approximately 8% Hispanic or Latino. These demographic facts are well-known to Talltown residents.
As Brandi, a popular good student, who is active in extra curricular activities, in her mid-teens and from a respected and historically established family, said, "We don't have a whole lot of ethnicity." Here Brandi not only reveals an awareness of her community's relative racial and ethnic homogeneity, she also illustrates another important Talltown discursive norm, that Talltown, being most Caucasian, is a place where ethnic neutrality is the norm.

The most recent U.S. census also reveals other interesting demographic information for the Talltown community. The population of Talltown is fairly evenly split with regard to gender, but with regards to age is a bigger division. The population is predominately middle-aged, with more than half of its population being 35 years of age or older, with 45 being the approximate average age of residents. Given nationwide trends toward university education and the fact that there is only a branch of a community college in Talltown, the age group that is least represented in the census data is 20 to 24. This is perhaps to be expected since it is in this age range that local and national norms suggest people should attend college. Given that there are limited higher education opportunities in Talltown (except for online, distance education), it should come as no surprise to find that those Talltown youth that do attend college, primarily reside elsewhere during this time.

Economics

Talltown is an historically resource-dependent community in the age of neoliberal globalization, but it is also a county seat and as such an important service
sector hub. Still, agriculture and natural resource extraction sectors persist despite a nation-wide trend toward a post-industrial service economy. While agricultural endeavors are generally consolidating, they remain culturally important. The natural resource sector is proliferating. In particular, Talltown may be poised to take advantage of new technologies and previously less-exploited natural resources.

**Agriculture**

2010 Department of Labor data for the county indicates that approximately 10% of Talltown County's workforce is employed in animal or crop agriculture. So despite declines in human inputs and number of owners in the industry overall, some Talltown residents still work in agriculture, especially cow-calf operations and hay cultivation. This includes people who own ranches and people who work on ranch-hands or as cowboys for hire. Talltown community discourse proudly emphasizes local agriculture and in so doing enacts and reinforces the norms of ranching and cowboy culture, both of which are primarily masculine fields. They are cowboys after all, the giant cut-out wooden placards, positioned along the roadside to greet visitors from each direction coming into town.

Talltown community discourse proudly emphasizes local agriculture, particularly through the ritual of Fair and the importance of youth participation in 4-H and FFA activities. Talltown also has a wealth of natural capital, which lends itself to grazing cattle, further reinforcing the symbolic importance of this economic sector. Because ranching is so deeply rooted in Talltown local culture, it is easily
incorporated into the local discourse of economics.

Ranching conveys a sense of power in land ownership, while the cowboy embodies power in a certain masculinity in independence, though he is employed by the rancher. Much of the ranch land is owned by families of Irish descent that have been in the Talltown area for generations. These families are particularly well-known as respected, with wives who work as professionals off-ranch. Most ranch owners and operators meanwhile male, though there are exceptions. The historical trend seems to yet lean toward bequeathing ranches to sons. Where land is divided amongst children to include daughters, sisters are often "bought out" by brothers. Youth who inherit ranches can afford to get a university degree and often their one or both parents have also been to college, where they too have studied something relevant to the ranch work, perhaps Animal Science, Ranch Management, or Marketing.

The life of the cowboy is different. Jose is a Hispanic student at Talltown High School who is in his late teens. Jose has spent most of his free time during high school working and playing on ranches. For him, the line between work and play is blurred. When talking about what he and his friends like to do for fun in their free time, Jose said, "We like to cowboy together and go buck out—and bulls—and ride colts together... We like to brand together." Jose would like to go attend a regional community college and pursue an education that will help him to achieve his dream of owning a ranch, or if that is not attainable a store, perhaps specializing in saddles. But Jose will not inherit a ranch, nor will he inherit a business. His father owns neither. He works on one, as a "cattle boss." But even if Jose cannot attain his goal of a
college education or owning a ranch, he is confident that he can find work. After all, he has done so since he was an adolescent. Jose is resilient in this way. He sees himself as and embodies the cowboy. In doing so he strategically positions himself in such a way as to sidestep the potential problem of not being able to afford college.

Even those who do not make a living as a rancher or cowboy possess a certain amount of local cultural knowledge about it and so participate in the discourse of ranching. Non-ranchers and cowboys also possess a number of skills valuable in ranching. Because the ranches are such a big part of Talltown’s community identity, young residents often have the opportunity to spend time on help out on the ranches of friends. As Stephanie, a beautician and lifelong resident in her late twenties said, "A lot of like my friends lived on ranches and stuff so we were out with the cows and our parents doin' chores and stuff all the time." Through this practice and rituals like Fair, the ranching character of Talltown is symbolically reinforced.

Natural Resources

In Talltown today, as in the past, people find some employment in natural resource industries. Among Talltown’s natural resource extraction and processing endeavors, most prominent is timber. Today, around 7.5% of the Talltown County workforce is employed in wood products manufacturing. In the past the timber industry provided good jobs in greater numbers. Jobs were to be had harvesting timber and milling it at one of the dozen or more sawmills in the area as late as the 1970s. Today there is only one sawmill and even it has scaled back its operation in
recent years. Through and beyond the construction of a recently approved biomass plant that will make use of small diameter timber from the forest floor and also timber milling waste, some additional jobs in this sector will soon become available. Perhaps then there will be a local timber equivalent status performance similar to that of the cowboy. This is interesting both sectors involve one party hiring its labor out to another and both are symbolically rather masculine. And yet although work in some part of the timber industry constitutes a "good job" it does not carry quite the symbolic weight of its agricultural counterpart.

Talltown residents have also found natural resource industry employment in mining. Shortly after World War II, the federal government encouraged exploration of uranium mining opportunities and as a result uranium prospecting became quite popular in the Talltown area in the 1950s. By the 1960s the uranium veins were tapped out and by the late 1980s when the former mines were name superfund sites, the era of uranium mining came to a close. The only mining operation in the Talltown area today is one that began in the late 1990s. This operation extracts a volcanic glass used in construction and horticulture, called Perlite. Jobs mining Perlite are also considered "good jobs" because, as 20 year-old Talltown mechanic Dane put it, they are "pretty good payin'," but "most jobs you get paid good for and you don't have a degree they're all labor, hard work." Here Dane demonstrates the discursive norm of "good jobs" as well-compensated and only attainable at the cost of a degree or hard labor.

Talltown may eventually have more people employed in another natural
resources area, geothermal energy. Harnessing geothermal energy could create jobs in construction and technical maintenance. So far the Talltown area's geothermal energy has been harnessed to heat the prison, which is just outside of town, and the business incubator facility. There is also talk about harnessing this energy to heat the school, the hospital and local residences, many of which are presently heated by costly propane or wood stoves. Long-term it may even be possible for Talltown to sell some of this geothermal energy to Talltown's energy-hungry neighbor to the south, California. In the last year, more than one company has announced intent to develop a geothermal power plant in the county, which could also feasibly create some jobs, including technical and professional jobs for Talltown residents. There are always trade-offs though, in opting for one type of economic development over another. As the apparent result of existing geothermal harnessing, at least one area geyser is now only erupting periodically, a trend, which if it grew, could negatively impact Talltown's meager tourism industry.

Talltown has recently undergone a small economic boom in the form of a natural gas pipeline project, taking place in the region, and the workers it has brought to Talltown. The pipeline project does not employ many people from Talltown, but the community nevertheless benefits from the money the project and its workers bring in. The company has rented land on which to house workers, in RV lots and "man camp," in numbers variously estimated by those I talked with as "a couple hundred," "five hundred," even "a thousand." So long as the pipeline workers, known locally as "pipeliners" do not drive out of town to spend their money, the Talltown economy
benefits.

One might think that the pipeliners would not want to drive so far out of town during their limited time off, particularly when they spend so much time driving out the project sites and back each of the days they work. And yet two of the four pipeliners I talked with did just that. Saving money and having more consumer choice were worth the drive. Pipeliners are, of course, still spending some money in local grocery stores, enough to clear the shelves of certain products from time to time before the grocery stores could adjust their ordering practices, and enough to make parking at the grocery more difficult. Pipeliners are easily identifiable there with their safety vests of yellow-green and orange, and in the parking lot with their big pickup trucks with heavy-duty toolboxes, if not other machinery and equipment. Local restaurants and bars, however, do face some competition for pipeliner dollars, because of an establishment opened specifically to cater to the pipeliners by a man who has opened several similar establishments in other places with similar pipeline projects.

People I talked with described the pipeline project and the temporary influx of population it brought to Talltown both positively and negatively. Allison said, "the pipeliners are helping the [economic] situation but they're only gonna be there for six months." Some ideas about the pipeliners presence were neither positive, nor mixed, but negative. There is, for instance, a local rumor that embodies the norm of them against us, in which local businesses are said to have raised their prices on their goods and services in order to make the maximum profit while the pipeliners are in the area. High school senior Holly mentioned this phenomenon in regard to her workplace and
said, "It's really hard because the prices have gone up so damned high. Um, like our pizzas went up like $7 a pizza. I mean, that doesn't seem like a lot, but it really is like a lot for a pizza." The influx of pipeline workers looking for non-company housing has also strained the housing market in Talltown, reducing the number of available rentals, something both Holly and Ted, an early twenties expectant father who works in a local communications retail and service outlet, had recently experienced.

Pipeliners are also blamed for the traffic congestion in Talltown. I experienced a bit of that myself. Occasionally traffic would stop in all directions while a large piece of equipment was transported through town. In a town with no stoplights it is not surprising that residents would feel it was more difficult to pull out onto main roads with the increased number of vehicles on the road.

There may be still more natural resource jobs in Talltown’s future. Some people in the Talltown area are also advocating for the development of wind energy turbines to be placed in northern portions of the county, though many residents of that immediate area especially, are, so far, resistant to that plan. The previously mentioned biomass plant has comparatively more local support than the wind turbines, which some county residents feel would detract from the beauty of the landscape and their ability to enjoy living in it.

Service

Increasingly in Talltown, as in the rest of the country, people are working in the service sector, in which people utilize their skills and knowledge in the production of
information and services or the sale, but not necessarily production, of goods. Approximately 10% of Talltown's labor force is employed in retail. 23% is employed in entertainment and leisure services industry, including approximately 7% in food service. Far fewer, only 1 or 2%, work in information, financial, or otherwise professional services. Talltown small businesses take many forms. They include restaurants, clothing and jewelry boutique, garden supplies stores, flower shops, and hardware stores. Some of these small businesses depend, at least partly, on tourist dollars. Although there is no interstate that passes near Talltown, there are some reasonably well-maintained highways by which tourists do come to fish, camp, hang glide, hunt, hike, and experience the beautiful Talltown landscape.

Being a small business owner is having a "good job," but it is a demanding job. Small business may start out as one-person operations and if they experience some measure of success and growth, they may then employ others as store clerks or salespeople, cashiers, cooks, waitresses, hairdressers, gas station attendants and janitorial staff. Lori, a small business owner, with some college, and a large and historically established family in Talltown, in her early twenties works a part time job on top of all the work she does running her own business. She works this second job in order to pay her living expenses. Though she would like to hire staff and grow her business (at least until the time comes for her to have a family) at present her business is not making enough money for her to cut herself a check, even though she handles every aspect of the business herself. Moreover, she is running the business with her savings. Despite the challenges it brings, small town entrepreneurship was something
Lori knew she wanted. Having this "good job" is enough compensation, at least for now.

Judging by the empty storefront windows in downtown Talltown, there is room for small business growth. As the nature of retailing increasingly scaled up and became more corporate than mom-and-pop size, many of Talltown's stores and shops closed, though several of the old signs still adorn the buildings in town. For a time, Talltown residents found themselves with no supplier of basic necessities like socks and underwear. Today this need is met (in the most minimal consumer sense) by a store that offers a mix of party supplies, basic necessities, odds and ends. Now residents have at least this option for basics, along with school and kitchen supplies, and a small selection of home decor items. The need for more entrepreneurs is a prominent theme in Talltown community discourse. For example Kim, a former Business teacher at Talltown High School said,

I think along the lines of business, 'cause that's what I taught. So I'm thinkin' you know, like we don't have a clothing store. Would it succeed? I don't know. But when you can't even buy underwear hardly in town you know. Um, would it work? Lots of businesses have gone under. But maybe it's because they don't have that, that skill level. And you know, I think that's, the part of the problem that I see, and again it comes back to my biases, that um, it was really hard to get kids in Business classes here. Because they had to take so many other classes that you know, you have to take 4 years of Science, Math, English and it doesn't leave a lot of opportunities and in your um, your elective classes are butting up against required classes. So the kids don't really get that opportunity to excel and to do you know, to go into those classes that might work for them.

For Kim, there is opportunity to foster an entrepreneurial spirit in the youth of Talltown, but various other restrictions and requirements, particularly of school curriculum, present a roadblock.
While Talltown community discourse suggests that there is a need for more retail stores and other small service-providing businesses, it does indicate a need more restaurants. To a person of a more metropolitan background, such as myself, this came as a surprise. There are not, after all, many restaurants in Talltown. There is a Chinese restaurant, which is closed for weeks at a time whenever the family that operates it travels to visit family, a Mexican restaurant, and a vaguely Italian restaurant. There is one national sandwich franchise, a local burger joint, and a quick-stop restaurant popular during open lunch at the high school. There are two pizza places, one of which is located in the bowling alley. There are two restaurants offering breakfast and diner food, three local restaurant-bars, and the limited though tasty offerings of the local butcher and specialty food shop.

Heather, a relative newcomer in her late twenties who teaches and married into a very well-established Talltown area family, explained that these restaurant options are more than sufficient for Talltown residents because they just do not dine out very often. She said,

I really like to cook a lot. And so we as a group of friends like to have each other over. Um, and we like to just do one part of the meal and everybody else brings something else. It kind of gets away from having to go out to dinner since there's not so many options. And then we try new things. Um, but I love, I love to entertain and so I like to cook...spending time together...eating.

One reason people of Talltown do not dine out often is the limited selection Heather eludes to, which as we have seen is not so much a limited selection by type, but perhaps by what Heather perceives as quality. She gives one other, arguably more important, reason for dining at home. In a place with limited options for consumer-
based entertainment (there are only a few lanes at the bowling alley and the movie theater plays only one movie per weekend, which has usually been out a while, and is closed during the week), cooking and eating together in homes is a major way to socialize. This is not merely a practical solution to a dearth of dining options that individuals and families might otherwise more regularly utilize. Community discourse indicating no need for more restaurants reflects the very important norm of community closeness, as symbolized in inviting others to one's home, cooking, and eating together.

**Government**

The largest employment sector for Talltown is government, be it city, county, federal, with approximately 43% of the workforce employed in this sector. These are the ultimate "good jobs," especially important are those that relate to natural resource management. There are several federal agencies of this type and importance in Talltown, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and with a slightly smaller presence U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFW). Employees of the BLM primarily manage (through survey and physical labor) grazing areas, which are made available to local ranchers. USFS employees primarily manage the Talltown area's forestland, managing harvests from it and protecting it from catastrophic fire. USFW, as the name implies, conducts surveys regarding native and invasive species. Within these different federal agencies there are a number of jobs to be had, both for youth preparing for future careers and people looking for "good jobs."
These agencies offer the scientific and management positions of the highly desired, college degree requiring kind. They also offer manual jobs, in particular seasonal work on the fire crew. And there are jobs that Hannah, an early twenties college student, described as "Biological Field Technician" jobs, which youth often fill. Hannah herself has worked on the "Bat Crew." As she said, "I get to catch bats...It's really fun and really interesting." Other youth do similar work on the Noxious Weed Crew. Employment of youth in this sector, because it prepares them for "good jobs" in the future, reinforces the Talltown discursive norm of meritocracy.

**Cultivated Human Capital**

As unemployment rates have risen in Oregon and in the U.S. broadly, so have they risen in Talltown County. According to the Oregon Employment Department the unemployment rate in the current year, between 2011 and 2012, has hovered around 9% in Oregon and in the U.S. broadly. In Talltown it has been approximately 13%.

College education is something very prominent in Talltown community discourse. The percentage of Talltown county residents with at least a Bachelor's Degree is approximately 15%. The percentage of Talltown residents with this level of educational attainment is closer to 7%, compared to 22% nationally (GIS Planning Inc. 2012). It is an interesting discrepancy between the Talltown county and Talltown proper levels of educational attainment. The higher level in the county, might perhaps, be a reflection of the capital held by ranchers and a reflection of their tendency to obtain a college education.
It is significant that Talltown discourse reflects a local idea of the community as being more educated than it actually is, particularly in relation to other places. Thus people talk about how lucky county youth are to have the scholarship programs available to them and what a unique opportunity this is. It would be interesting to know of the approximately 100 high school graduates Talltown County produces annually, how many go on to obtain at least Bachelor's Degrees. Perhaps the numbers are on the rise. Or perhaps more students set out to undertake college than actually end up completing it. Talltown High School graduates approximately 90% of its students, so the percentage may be significantly higher than the percentage of current Talltown residents with at least a Bachelor's Degree.

However many college graduates Talltown produces, the prevalence of college in its discourse about young people is a major factor in how youth are ascribed certain social qualities and within which youth negotiate position. This norm is reinforced with the ritual of awarding scholarships, made available to students who complete all four years of high school in Talltown County. These scholarships are a major draw for parents, who might allow their child to live with their former spouse in Talltown just so their children can be eligible for the scholarships. Other parents, especially those working in the federal agencies, might forego or delay transfers for the same reason. In making such choices for their children, these parents reinforce for youth, the norm of college education.

Given their role in preparing youth for this increasingly important form of post-secondary education, primary and secondary school are also important early
contributors to the cultivation of Talltown human capital and to the internalization of
the norm of college education. Talltown community discourse reflects an
understanding of these facts, as it is evidenced not only in talk about the community's
quality schools, but also in the way the community mobilizes to support student
activities. They pay admission fees at sporting events, which are generally very well-
attended. They also support fundraising efforts by students, buying coupon books or
chocolate bars or whatever it is the students are selling this time around. District
budgets may be stretched (and indeed they are) but educators and administrators work
hard to provide for Talltown youth. Recently new, more efficient lighting was
installed in the high school, the savings of which can then be used to support
underfunded programs and keep teacher-student ratios at current levels, which are
described in community discourse as beneficial for student learning.

The Talltown school administration also goes above and beyond in their extra-
curricular sports offerings. These include the usual sports like basketball, football,
softball, soccer, wrestling, track, and cross-country, but also golf, skiing, swimming.
Some of these are funded through the local school system, others supported by student
fundraisers. School administrators know that youth often complain of having "nothing
to do" and so provide as many opportunities as they can to keep the youth busy, and
thus keep them out of trouble. Talltown community discourse describes a school
system that does a great job of providing opportunities, especially athletic
opportunities, for local youth.

Beyond extra curricular activities as modes of identity exploration, youth in
Talltown schools are also encouraged to find themselves in academics. Here again the avenues of exploration are somewhat limited. Just as extra curricular offerings are limited by budgets and availability of coaches, there are curricular requirements that limit youth in their ability to try out different classes that can help them explore careers that might suit them. Although the school offers a number of practical hands-on skill-building classes, like the Agriculture class, Drafting, and Personal Finance, these are elective courses, and are hard to fit into a student's schedule alongside so many required credits of Math, Science, English, and Social Studies. In finding out what subjects they like and dislike, and finding out in what subjects they are particularly skilled, Talltown secondary students can undertake identity exploration in what has become one of, if not the primary arenas of socialization in the U.S. today, but at present, they can only do so to a limited degree.

In both academics and extra curricular activities, Talltown secondary students encounter meritocracy. Students are told that if they work hard, they will be successful in school and thus better positioned get into college, perhaps winning scholarships for this purpose, and eventually successfully completing a degree. Discourse among teachers was particularly strong in favor of some form of post-secondary education or training for all students. This reflects the Talltown and national norm of post-secondary education as being the key to social and economic upward mobility. Rachel, a relative newcomer who is married, a mother, and a teacher, said,

One thing I really want to do with my [students] is I'd like to prepare them, not necessarily to go to college, though I think that a lot of them will go to college,
and I think that's a good first step for them. I just want them to be ready for whatever comes after high school. And for some kids, again, that's college, other kids it's the military, some it's the workforce.

And Heather, another relative newcomer and teacher, who is married, but not yet a parent, said,

Here we're pushing them to get some sort of post-secondary education. I don't care what it is. But leave, go out, do something, come back. You know, it doesn't matter what it is, but you need to have some training. They will not make it with just a high school degree. And that is, that is a huge push here.

With this regular emphasis placed on the value of a college education, it is no wonder that many Talltown adolescents come to see college as the necessary next step following high school graduation. Even Wendy, a bartender in her mid-twenties, noted,

The kids here they have so many different programs for 'em, like in school for them to get scholarships and you know, get out of the Talltown. It's not like they're saying, 'Oh, you need to stay in Talltown.' It's, but every single, 98% of the kids are not even 98% but the majority of the children that do graduate, they move on and they go to college, they go to other places.

Here Wendy invokes the norm of college education as a necessity in the world today. She also mentions the problem with this norm, that the futures of those who buy into and successfully follow the university path into adulthood, may well occur outside of Talltown.

The norm of college education is also reinforced by the existence of several local scholarship programs. Incoming freshmen receive a talk about the scholarships available to them just for spending all four years of high school in Talltown County schools and working hard while there. Students hear about two scholarships they should be thinking about right away. The oldest, founded in the early 1920s, provides
scholarships for those who go on to study at any of the state-run four-year colleges. The other provides scholarships to those who study at out-of-state and trade schools. At school youth hear that these scholarships are "attainable." The oldest scholarship, for example, has funded more than 2,000 students to date and each year there are approximately 40 Talltown County high school graduates attending college on this scholarship. As an added incentive to set their post-secondary sights high, there is also a scholarship for graduate study.

There is also public reinforcement of the norm of college education. Historically scholarship winners have been known to later occupy many of Talltown's prominent professional positions. Names of winners have also historically been posted in storefronts along the Talltown's Main Street. The local newspaper and newsletters also like to recognize winners, as do pastors in their announcements at the start of Sunday services.

Paula, a middle-aged woman who works with local youth, said that the scholarships, "help kids to get in tune that that's what they're gonna do is go to college. So I think that helps them make that decision that there's money to help 'em, that's available for them." One drawback to these scholarships, which both Paula and Paul, her middle-aged co-worker, noted is that they do not account for financial need. Those who are awarded scholarships receive them because their grade point average and standardized test scores were more competitive than their peers. Students with greater financial need are of no higher priority in awarding the scholarships. The most important fact about these scholarships is that they are awarded based on merit, not
need. They cover approximately one third of the cost of schooling each year, so would not be enough to cover the entire cost of college attendance without some other source of funding, like loans or parental support. Scholarships are awarded based on GPAs and scholastic aptitude tests, and judged against the pool of immediate competitors. The scholarships and the ways they are emphasized are a major contributing factor in the dominance of the norm of college education and the hard work required to win a scholarship. In the way they are awarded, with no recognition of need, they also reinforce the idea that class difference is irrelevant.

Because these scholarships are so dominant in Talltown community discourse, they are also dominant in Talltown youth discourse. Sometimes, a youth's outlook is that of a big fish in a small pond. Because she works with youth, this is a trend teacher Heather, a relative newcomer who married into a very well-established area family, has noticed, though she does not believe it all that common. She said,

> Here we're so isolated that they don't see, they don't have somebody else to compare themselves to. So, sometimes, sometimes, not all the time, sometimes there's a, on a rare occasion, they um, have a skewed sense of where they rank and where would rank themselves. Um, you know, going to a Division I school versus going to a Division III school versus a junior college. Um, and the level of competition in the high school area is not as strong because kids don't have those outside teams to go play for that aren't affiliated with the school.

Youth who are looking ahead to scholarships are clear believers in the meritocratic promise that their hard work will position them well for a college education and a "good job" following that.

Landscape, geography, demographics, and economics, including the opportunity to cultivate human capital, contribute to the system by which youth, as Talltown
community members in-socialization, are evaluated. Acceptance and belonging in community is therefore largely dependent on how well one embodies the norms of place. This is why some youth, those strategically performing community belonging, express appreciation for "God's country," describe the inconvenience of Talltown's geographic placement, engage in ranching or cowboy work, and work hard to earn scholarships in order to get a "good job."

Small Town

What makes a place rural is mostly a matter of place, not community. In discourse about Talltown as community, one theme is salient above all others. Talltown is a small town. People very rarely use the descriptor rural to describe Talltown, unless they are specifically talking about Talltown as a place. More often than not, people describe Talltown as a small town and in so doing emphasize the primary role of community. As I got to know Talltown and its people better, I came to understand what people meant when the referred to Talltown as a small town. Clearly there is a lot of meaning packed into this one idea, but what is generally encapsulated in the phrase small town is a particular way of relating to others. Social relations in Talltown are guided by this small town idea and the lives of youth are greatly shaped by it.

Community Closeness

Talltown residents may discursively sidestep issues of socially constructed
difference, but local discourse of difference remains strong. Particularly prominent are ideas about reputation, and what are good and bad qualities and behaviors. In this way Talltown discourse about difference juxtaposes the norms of the myth of meritocracy. If everyone can have success within the limits of their own capabilities, why is everyone not successful?

Social relations in Talltown are undergirded by the norm of community closeness. This is a value that adults and youth enact together through family gatherings, especially at holidays, extended family reunions, and Fair. This norm is reinforced by Talltown community discourse about "knowing everyone." For example, Eduardo, who is an Hispanic in his mid-teens, who has throughout his life, circularly migrated in and out of Talltown, the nearest large city, and Mexico, made such a statement. He said, "It's such a small town that everybody kind of knows each other here." Paul, a middle-aged man who works with youth, said, "Here you wave at somebody and they wave back. You get into bigger places... they look at you like, 'What the hell you wavin' at me for?'" I also experienced the people of Talltown to be friendly, particularly when they waved as we passed in our pickup trucks or they chatted with me in the grocery store.

The norm of community closeness involves more than just familiarity. Lori, an entrepreneur in her mid-twenties from a very large and historically established family, suggests that the norm of community closeness involves a certain intimacy in relationships, a friendship forged over time, which can last a whole life long. She said, that there are young people of Talltown who "still hang out with like, their
friends from high school and middle school, which is pretty cool." Megan, a
Caucasian homemaker in her late twenties, eludes to this dimension of the norm of
community closeness in her view that it means being supportive and accepting of one
another, much like friends and family are. She said,

Everyone's just so accepting and you know, there's just, everyone's so
supportive. I just, it would be hard to you know, growin' up anywhere else, I
just can't even imagine it. I don't know. You know, there's a lot of pressures
to fit in, in other places it seems like. More so than here.

To someone not from a small town, this statement may come as a surprise. Urbanites
may have a tendency to think about people in small towns as less open-minded than
they are, but for Megan, at least, the truth is quite the opposite.

Despite all the talk about Talltown community closeness, there some ways in
which the community is not necessarily equally inclusive of all residents. As one
photovoice participant put it, "It's no matter who you are or whether you've kept a low
profile or not, you have a reputation in this town. It's one of the good and/or bad
things." Another photovoice participant seconded this idea by saying, "You can keep
to yourself and not say anything to anybody and you'll have a reputation." Mid-teens,
popular, good student, and member of a well-respected family, Brandi, echoes this
view saying, "It's good and bad, but you know a lot of people." This may involve
knowing people by name, but at the very least it means knowing them by sight and
knowing what family, or ranch, or business a person is affiliated with. And in the case
of adolescents, people know what friend group(s) they are affiliated with.

In a community where "everyone knows everyone," there are very few private
matters. Reputation is especially important in a community like Talltown. Here
community closeness means handshake deals suffice. Here the population is so small that there is little, if any, opportunity to go through the day anonymously. Word travels quickly in a small town too, whether it is news that is true, or simply rumor, as Eduardo experienced. He said,

I like to paint a lot and um, there's these train tracks by my house and people saw people writing on the trains and since I like to draw like a lot of graffiti, but like on paper, they assumed it was me, so a lot of people said it was me and I got into a problem with my mother because of that.

Eduardo is not the only Hispanic youth I talked with who shared a story of a rumor spreading and causing trouble for them at home. In each of this kind of story I heard, the rumor was about the Hispanic youth getting in trouble, regarding graffiti for Eduardo and regarding teen pregnancy in another case. Non-Hispanic youth I talked with also talked about information spreading quickly because the community is so close-knit. Once in a while a youth gets pulled over by police and their parents know about it before they even get home. From the adult perspective this immediacy of youth surveillance is positive as people are said to help look after each other's children.

Being well known in Talltown can be very negative if one is not so highly esteemed, because of some actual or supposed quality or behavior of one's own or of one's family. As one photovoice participant said, "If you're hanging out with somebody that has a reputation that isn't well-liked, then you're automatically lumped in and share that reputation. Reputations are contagious in this town." Eduardo's being falsely accused of being a graffiti artist is one example. In another, Caucasian high school senior Ben felt he, at least until his recent change in attitude and behavior,
had a reputation as one of "the bad people." He had not been embodying Talltown norms, but counter norms and so was looked often upon less favorably in the community.

In Talltown community discourse, a person's reputation may not be "good" because of (s)he embodies norms that are counter to those dominant in Talltown. Examples of embodied cultural knowledge that is counter to Talltown norms include (but are not limited to) being non-outdoorsy, anti-social or un-involved, a vegetarian, non-Caucasian, an environmentalist, a Democrat, non-Christian, and non-heterosexual. Certain ascribed statuses, like ethnicity, can shape the performance of the norm of community closeness. People can strategize around this norm by performing roles that are seen as thoroughly Talltown, roles such as the cowboy. Jose, a Hispanic cowboy in his late teens, does this. He enacts his local belonging through the role of the cowboy, and in so doing downplays his local ethnic Otherness.

Having a reputation can also be positive, particularly for those held in high esteem by the community, people like ranchers, business owners and community leaders. As Holly, a lifelong resident in her late teens said, "Names are a big thing in Talltown... If you have a big name people will know who you are and stuff like that and that kind of like, classifies people a lot." This is a very prominent theme in Talltown community discourse. Having a "good name" goes a long way in helping people, as Holly put it, "get what they want" and "get out of trouble." Wendy, a bartender in her mid-twenties who spent her early childhood in the Talltown area and has since returned, spoke to ways that people can inherit good names. She said, "Their
family owns business here... Everybody who has a name that has an established parent business here." Wendy went on to say that for youth, having a "good name" means one is popular. She said,

If you have an older brother that's popular, then you're automatically gonna fall into that. I mean and that's just how it is... you can have a different name, but it's all an association of who your family is. You know, your family can own a big ass ranch, but you're still gonna have a name. Because you have your cowboys and they fit well with everybody...It's just all in, I think what your parents did or what your parents do.

This is the ascribed way of getting a good name, the advantages of which Wendy reveals are not limited to ranching families, since families with good names might also operate a successful business.

"Names" of another sort are achieved. Youth who excel in school sports, for instance, can make a name for themselves. Student athletes are regularly lauded in the local paper and, as Lori and others said, "If you're an athlete you can get away with a little bit more it seems like. And like, I don't know if it's just 'cause people know you more, but you seem to get more attention, like in school, out of school, everywhere."

Dennis, a Marine and resident of Talltown from toddlerhood through high school who is in his early twenties, said something similar. He lamented how prominently student athletes were featured in the local paper, while his and others' military service received only brief mention. So for adolescents at least, school athletics is one avenue through which to strategically position oneself in the local field.

Maggie, a relative newcomer and high school student in her mid-teens suggests that being born and raised in Talltown makes it easier to achieve a good name. She said,
People that live here and [were] born here like, they have a good name, I guess you would say. And then like the new family that just moved here, like no one knows you and like, like, it's really hard for you I guess to get in, have a good name I guess.

So even if one does not have the advantage of belonging to a well-established Talltown area family, being born there gives one the opportunity to more thoroughly acquire Talltown norms, and thus a greater ability to make a good name for oneself. Here we see that a particularly local sense of indigeneity, in the form of having been born and raised in a place, is one sort of pathway and barrier to youths' strategic positioning.

Talltown's discursive emphasis on community closeness is intertwined with discourse of difference and reputation. Local distinctions between what are good and bad qualities and behaviors are powerful. Accordingly, image and reputation management is a fact of life for youth in this small town. This is a discursive reality rather different from that supposed in the myth of meritocracy, wherein everyone can achieve success within the limits of their own capabilities through hard work. In this way certain forms of differences are used to maneuver around others and the ability to "make it" through the principles of meritocracy, might depend most directly on one's position in the local hierarchy, not just class differences.

A Helping Hand When You Need It

It takes more than friendliness to make a close-knit community. Community self-sufficiency, or a community's ability to independently address the needs of its own members, depends on the willingness of members to help one another in times of
need. This goes beyond the 'it takes a village to raise a child' idea, which Paula, a middle-aged woman who works with youth, specifically mentioned. Yes, people talk about how parents help each other out by watching for trouble relating to other people's children. In a community like Talltown, that is relatively geographically isolated, especially when compounded by challenging winter weather, people may have no one to depend on other than their friends and neighbors. And so helpfulness, not surprisingly, is a dominant norm in Talltown community discourse.

In addition to assertions that Talltown residents are helpful, there are stories people tell as examples of this norm. Often these involve community members helping out when, like a water heater or a car, is broken. Heather, a teacher who married into one of the longest-established families in the area and is in her late twenties, said,

This community is filled with people who care. Um, and you know, really look out for one another. Um, I would say generally speaking people who don't know each other here are more apt to help you out than they would be in a big city. Um, you know people take the time to give that second glance like, you know, "Do you need something?" You know, and I felt that way about the people I grew up with, but um, it, it doesn't go for everybody you know. If you're stuck on the side of the road there could be 20 cars that go past before somebody stops. And here it's the first car that goes past, "Do you need anything?"

For Heather, helping out in this way is evidence of personal character, in particular caring, something she sees as a quality many in, if not most of, the community share. Stephanie supports this view when she says of her time growing up in Talltown, "everybody kind of looked out for everybody." This particular community ideal, I think, reflects the necessity of community self-sufficiency born of relative geographic isolation that partly defines Talltown as a place and community.
An extension of the norms of community closeness and helpfulness, is yet another prominent norm in Talltown community discourse: that the Talltown community itself is like a family. This is in part because of the extended family kin groups that have established themselves over the generation, but it is also about how non-kin relate as if they were family, with closeness and helpfulness. Church groups are one example of how non-kin can be like family. Allison, lifelong resident from a well-established family and college student in her early twenties, said of the Baptist youth group, "They were very, very close like almost cousins, family close to each other." Having people that are like family within the community can confer certain advantages. Derek said, "I think that a person that has a lot of family here or even if their parents have a lot of friends here, I feel like they have a lot greater support system than somebody who doesn't." Unfortunately, despite the discourse of community closeness in Talltown, there are individuals who, for one reason or another, do not feel such closeness within their community, a topic we will return to later.

**Community Involvement**

When Talltown discourse turns on the norm of community involvement, what is referenced is not only involvement within nuclear and extended families or friend groups. Also referenced is involvement in social, philanthropic, work, or religious organizations and, among adolescents, participation in extra curricular activities, especially athletics and 4-H. Community involvement is more than a norm. It is also
seen as a necessity in Talltown, as a way to cope with being so far removed from more populated areas with more people to meet and things to do. As a norm nearly turned necessity, failure to embody involvement can come back to haunt people in Talltown. As youth and newcomers encounter this discourse, they learn that involvement is a norm by which they will be judged and so to which they ought to live up.

Youth activities, especially sports and 4-H, symbolize community involvement. They also demonstrate the cultural importance of assessing the social positions of Talltown youth. They are also important avenues through which Talltown adolescents can negotiate position among peers and in the community. Because the teams need all the players they can get, and because there is no necessary cap on the number of young people who can take a 4-H project to Fair, participation in these activities comes to be discussed as one way of distinguishing between adolescents who are in the process of "going somewhere" and those who are at risk of "getting stuck."

Community involvement involves being giving of oneself and one's time, such as through volunteer work or on a team. Yes, those who embody this norm often make important contributions in communities, but there are individual benefits too. For one, embodying the norm of community involvement provides people opportunities to socialize. For Matt, a teacher in his late twenties who has been in Talltown less than five years, involvement in such groups has been the key to his social success in Talltown. He said,

I got involved very quickly in coaching, got involved very quickly with the church OK and didn't know those groups and with it being such a very Catholic community, Irish Catholic community, that helped out a lot. I got myself involved in a lot of the charity things. I got myself very much involved in
coming to sports events and with the school and trying to get yourself into so many different things that you meet a lot of people that would be your age or that know somebody that's your age. And that's how, that's how you meet a lot of 'em. And I took a summer job, I work at the BLM during the summer time so I meet a lot of people my age doing that, during the summer. So I have very much forced myself into social groups in order to meet people, maybe I'd be interested in being friends with or more.

Matt suggests that making friends in Talltown requires putting oneself out there in the form or formal organizational membership and participation in various activities. The same could be said of adolescent youth who go out for teams or join clubs. Ann, a relative newcomer who lives with her boyfriend, is in her mid-thirties, and has a graduate degree, echoes Matt's point about involvement in formal organizations as essential to having a social life in Talltown. She said,

There's the whole raft of obligatory socialization, which is um, you know community events that for one reason or another I should prob'ly be a part of, or be seen at. Um for my job, like the, the Talltown Honor's Society Dodge-ball Tournament...Well, I had to get a team together and go, right?...There's a lot of community events that we go to and of course you socialize because you know all the people there.

For Ann there is a distinction between obligatory and optional socialization. Though she feels she ought to attend certain community events, even these give her opportunity to socialize. Community involvement, is in these ways, both norm and necessity in Talltown. Deviance from this norm is especially apparent, and remarked upon, given the widespread internalization of the idea of community closeness.

A Good Place to Raise a Family

Another prominent discursive norm is that Talltown is family-friendly and "a good place to raise kids." Discourse on this subject includes several pieces of
supporting evidence. One, which late-twenties homemaker, Megan voiced, is that there are lots of activities that revolve around and are designed for young and school-aged children. In this way the wider Talltown community is said to be very supportive of local youth. This was further evidenced by talk about how many community members how many adults volunteer their time supporting youth activities, such as when they lead 4-H groups, and attend athletic events. I observed community support of high school athletics to be tremendous. I also observed there to be many more attendees at high school athletic events than at middle school athletic events. There were other noticeable differences between these two levels of school athletics as well. At the high school level, music is played over loudspeakers as is commentary about the game. At the middle school level things are noticeably quieter, in part because the crowds are smaller, but also because there is not usually music or commentary.

Talltown community discourse also supports the family-friendly norm with talk about the high quality teachers that work in the local schools. Teachers are lauded for their care for and investment in students in the classroom and in extra curricular activities. Teacher quality, if evidenced through mention of one-on-one time, which Jonathan, a late-twenties lifelong resident (except for time he was in college and graduate school), described, is of great value in preparation for college. Together teachers and parents make a formidable team in the quest to prepare local young people the challenges of the next phase of life and the more ambiguous challenges of their adult futures.

Quality education aside, there are still more ways that Talltown community
discourse supports the idea that Talltown is a good place to raise a family. Lori, an entrepreneur in her early twenties, and Stephanie, a beautician in her late twenties, talked about how people want to raise their kids in Talltown because it is where they were raised and, as Stephanie said, that's "special," particularly when kids are raised, as Paula, a middle-aged woman who works with youth, suggested, around their extended family.

Talltown community discourse also reveals that the small town community culture is taken as yet more evidence of what makes Talltown a good place to raise children. Late twenties homemaker, Megan suggested that many Talltown parents want their kids to be raised on ranches, or at least in a ranching community because of the strong work ethic this upbringing imparts to children. This kind of work ethic is assumed to better prepare Talltown youth to meet the challenges of adulthood, compared to their suburban and urban counterparts. Mark, a mechanic in his early twenties, said that that kids who grow up in a small town are "more respectful and down to earth" than their more urban and suburban counterparts. Brandi, an Honors student from a well-respected family, who is in her mid-teens, even went so far as to say that because there is no shopping mall in Talltown, youth raised there are "not as materialistic" as their non-rural counterparts.

There is one more aspect of local discourse that supports the idea that Talltown is a place and community that is family-friendly. This is the feeling of safety people have there. As mentioned previously, this is partly about safety for youth from the contaminating influences of suburban and urban places and people. Thus Brandi said
of raising kids in Talltown, you "know that they're safe and [can] let 'em go out and have fun without havin' to worry" because as Talltown youth know, "if you do something wrong, your parent'll find out. People have eyes. They keep each other's children accountable." Megan echoed this statement and the descriptor, "healthy."

Of course there are some people who discursively contradict the idea that Talltown is a safe place. Brandi seems to question depth of this safety when she says, "I think going to public school you get exposed to a lot of things." She suggests that perhaps the safe quality of the community does not necessarily carry over into youth populations. Two people I talked with (one youth, one adult) mentioned the risk presented by child molesters. Another seemed to be talking around this phenomenon, but not comfortable enough to get into specifics. Sometimes, in light of experience or knowledge that contradicts the discourse about Talltown as a safe place, people I talked with spoke in such a way as to "further mobilise another ingredient of the rural idyll--community" (Valentine 1997:137). Matt, a teacher in his late twenties, provides an example of this. He said, "If some of our parents see somebody's kids screwing around they'll call those parents, "Hey, I saw so and so out there, were they supposed to be out there?"" So even when the evidence for Talltown as family-friendly does not hold, there are other aspects of place and community, which can be mobilized as further justification of the norm.

Certain aspects of the Talltown’s broad community character are also discursively held to be advantages for the youth. One is the laid-back relaxed pace and tempo of life in Talltown. This is said to result in youth that are not only
appreciative of what they have (i.e. less materialistic) but also friendly, hard-working and part of (not separate from) the local community. Ann, a relative newcomer to Talltown who is in her mid-thirties, said,

I do interact with kids on a pretty regular basis through [my work] and most of them I think are well-adjusted, better adjusted to social settings um than kids even in suburbs and major cities because um, one of the things I think is a strength of communities like this is that children are expected to be a part of the broader social structure, rather than being isolated to themselves and their teachers. Um, but then there's, you know they get a lot of opportunities here to do a lot of different things. Um and there is, I think, an expectation of involvement, both um, in school activities and in community activities. And I think all of those things are ultimately beneficial for the children.

Here again, we see how the involvement of youth in their rural community constitutes a major criterion by which youth social positions are ascribed and negotiated.

In the preceding examples we get a sense of just how powerful the discursive norm of community involvement is. We also get a sense of how it works on people, so that they downplay aspects of their identity deemed counter-normative, and play up areas in which they feel their are more able to embody the norm. The myth of meritocracy may argue that all people have, at some level, equal chances for success in life, but an examination of local norms, like community involvement, paints a rather different picture, one which undercuts the assumed sameness of meritocracy.

**A Place Out Of Time**

Amy, a college-educated mother of several children, who is in her early thirties, remarked on a timeless quality of Talltown. She said, "We always said that there was a space-time continuum blip in Talltown County and time slows down when you get
here. And you have to be able to adapt to that. Yes, the space-time continuum
lengthens when you hit the county line. It's just this weird thing. Physicists should be
checking it out.” Wendy, who has served in the military and currently works as a
bartender and is in her mid-twenties, ventured a reason for this apparent unchanging
quality of Talltown. She suggested that Talltown had not changed to keep pace with
other places (particularly by providing more opportunities for its youth) because of the
"good ol' boy system," a local unofficial leadership system, which is both gendered
and classed. In the discourse about Talltown politics, those in power are said to be
patriarchs of historically long-established Talltown area families and other owners of
large parcels of land, property in town, and owners of certain businesses.

The most prominent way in which this discursive norm is discussed, is with
stories of big box stores, like Wal-Mart and Bi-Mart, supposedly trying to come into
Talltown, but being shut down by the city council and those non-elected individuals
with influence over such matters. Ann, a graduate degree-holding relative newcomer
in her early thirties, explained why the "good ol' boys" would want to do such a thing.
She said,

All those people are leaving and a little few of them are coming back, but not a
lot of them, which means the population is actually, everybody talks about how
everything is decimated, it used to be way more populated, the census numbers
do not bear that out at all. So you know, population growth has been negligible
and one of the things that people who live in Talltown and [the county] really
like is that really sparsely populated feel and they like to feel involved and
networked in their community, so one of the impacts is that they get to keep that.

This suggests yet another discursive way in which Talltown youth might be judged.

Some would say the community should be preserved as it is. Others say it should be
changed. This begs important questions. Who are the people who see through the Talltown hierarchy? What do they do with this knowledge in a system where it is against the rules to draw attention to socially constructed difference?

Others Among Us

Urban people and those from small town America alike, may tell you that their communities are welcoming and inclusive. In rural places, born of the realities of relative geographic and seasonally weather related isolation, this may well be true, but is it most certainly more true for some than for others. In the U.S. broadly, certain groups may occupy marginalized social positions on the basis of class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality/gender identity. Talltown community discourse reveals some similar social facts.

Collin, a Caucasian college student in his early twenties, and Mark, a Caucasian mechanic in his early twenties, acknowledge these kind of differences, but go on to say that the Talltown community does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, or that, on the whole, the Talltown community does not discriminate, though there are always a few individuals who do.

Despite discourse about the Talltown community as non-discriminatory, the more I talked with people the more I heard many examples of prejudice, if not outright discrimination. One discursive thread described this as being less applicable to the Talltown Hispanic community because, as late twenties mother and beautician Stephanie said, "Hispanics are very common here." In making statements like this,
Stephanie reveals the norm that because there is little ethnic diversity in Talltown, prejudice and discrimination are not a problem there. By this logic, a place with much diversity would be more likely to experience such social ills. Stephanie went on to note that other racial and ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans would likely experience more discrimination in Talltown because they make up so small a portion of the population. Community discourse supports this idea with stories about African American families who had lived in Talltown in the past, but had not stayed long because they had experienced discrimination or were otherwise not made to feel welcome.

Derek, a mid-twenties man who is from a ranching family and who works with troubled community youth, spoke about discrimination as somewhat more widespread. He suggested that there is some, particularly racial or ethnic discrimination and intolerance among youth, a fact that I observed from time to time. I never heard a Talltown youth use a derogatory name in a moment of hateful expression, but I did witness and hear about some examples of carelessness regarding the impact one's words might have. In one example, I was at Fair at the Destruction derby when I overheard a couple of the young men in the row behind me talking about two men standing down at the front of the seating area. The men in question were far enough away so that I could not be sure, but it appeared that each of them were within the age range of emerging adulthood. One man, a Caucasian man, wore a red baseball cap, baggy light-washed jeans and a "wife-beater" (a sleeveless, white, men's undershirt). He was talking with another man, who was African American and dressed head to toe
in cowboy apparel. One of the young men sitting behind me referred to the Caucasian and African American man as "Slim Shady and Dr. Dre." This reference to two famous rappers, one Caucasian rapper and one African American rapper, in particular stands out because of its absurdity. The only thing that made the African American man like Dr. Dre was the fact that he was African American; nothing in his attire suggested anything other than that he was seriously committed to his cowboy identity.

Some of the Talltown community discourse about socially constructed difference suggests that there is more discrimination and intolerance among the older generation in Talltown. Talk about prejudice or discrimination among this group emphasizes national historical roots of discrimination over any particular local community character. Eduardo, for instance, who is in his mid-teens and Hispanic felt, based in part on what he told me about his experience being falsely accused of a crime, that the adults in town often blames minorities for problems, particularly crime.

There is also some Talltown community discourse to suggest that prejudice and discrimination are rather widespread in the community. Ben, a reformed partier in his late-teens, said, "Talltown's a pretty judgmental town." Mark, a mechanic in his early twenties, suggested that everyone in Talltown has been or will be discriminated against at some point, but that it is "all in fun," and not malicious. Lori, an entrepreneur with some college, who is in her early twenties, supports the idea that the way Talltown locals talk about people who are different is not intended to be hurtful. She said, "I would put it almost in the same class you know, black people, gay people. They're all kind of a joke here. I mean they're not really, but that's how it seems."
This is probably partly attributable, as Brandi, who is popular, Caucasian, and in her mid-teens, suggested, to the relative lack of diversity in Talltown.

There are similar discursive complexities about whether or not there is prejudice or discrimination in Talltown based on socioeconomic status. Mark, a mechanic in his early twenties, assured me that the community does not discriminate based on socioeconomic measures. Like with racial and ethnic diversity, this lack of socioeconomic discrimination is largely discursively attributed to Talltown's supposed lack of socioeconomic diversity. Collin, who is a lifelong resident of Talltown, except for the time he has been in college, Jonathan, his older brother who has a graduate degree, and Jose, a late-teens Hispanic cowboy, described Talltown as mostly middle-class. Matt, a teacher in his late twenties, said, "It's not a real wealthy community."

As an interesting note of contrast, I never heard it mentioned that Talltown did not have poor residents. However, Megan, a homemaker in her late twenties, suggested that there are some differences: "Your financial status would put you into a different group." She went on to say, "Who you are, you know, if you were raised here and grew up here" makes a difference regarding status in the community. Here Megan explicitly mentions that both time in residence and socioeconomic background influence one's status in Talltown. This suggests that people of lesser socioeconomic means who have been established in the community for some time, are looked upon more favorably than people of lesser socioeconomic means who are relatively newer to the community. But according to Matt, "that really doesn't matter, 'cause it's small enough that everybody's gonna be doin' the same things." So although Talltown
community discourse marks socially constructed differences such as race and class, there is some debate as to whether or not this reflects any particular norms of treatment for such individuals.

The more important point, I think, with regard to Others in Talltown, is that the norm of community closeness can be strategically used to discursively maintain the community's sense of homogeneity. The norm of community closeness can be put into discourse in such a way as to deny differences within the community. People who so use this norm accomplish at least one of two things. They play up their ability to effectively embody local norms, and thus their belonging in the community. They can also use this norm, in playing up the overall sameness of the community, to downplay their own difference. This is a hard thing to confirm, particularly as I am a Caucasian researcher perceiving a phenomenon among Hispanic informants. Still, I think it is a reasonable educated speculation to say that downplaying one's difference with the norm of community closeness might even have been strategic in the context of my interactions with Hispanic youth of Talltown. Perhaps even my interactions with Talltown youth from low-income households.

Talltown's physical and ideological distance from American consumerism together with local cultural practices, especially outdoor recreation, might suggest that socioeconomic status has little impact on one's experience of Talltown. But this, of course, is an oversimplification. Regardless of what is discursively asserted regarding socioeconomic prejudice and discrimination, socioeconomic difference is marked.
Ben, who is in his late teens and from a very low-income household with a chronically unemployed single parent, said,

You got the bad, the bad people and then you got what they call the good people. And the good people, yea, and the good people really look down on the bad people. And I feel good to be into the good people now, but I was a bad, in the bad group for a long time. And I don't like bein' looked down on at all.

When I asked Ben how people know who belongs in each group, he said, "Pretty much being a druggie and how you dress." So behaviors and appearance can each be used to ascribe social positions on youth. So can the part of town one lives in. Early in my time in Talltown, as I explained that I wanted to talk to people from all different backgrounds, I was often directed to the south end of town where there are a number of trailer homes. One photovoice participant noted the difficulty of pedestrian traffic at that end of town, owing to the lack of lighting and poor and non-existing sidewalks.

Mid-twenties bartender, Wendy, also noted the importance of where one's home is located in Talltown as it relates to one's socioeconomic standing. She said,

And if you're from the south end then you're poor obviously, because you look at it and it's, it's trashy looking. And that's just, it is. I'm not sayin' that to be mean. I mean, it's, there's no streetlights down there. It's horrible down there. And if you say, versus your middle part of town by the schools, your houses get nicer. So if you're from the middle part of town, you're obviously upper-class. Not upper-class, but you're family has it together if you're living in one of those houses. And if you move to the north side of town, well your, your family's pretty wealthy. Your family makes well, but they're, you're not living in the middle of town. But you can see the segregation if you drive through town or look at the different houses and everything, you can see. And I mean, there could be a kid that is a varsity player from the south side of town and people still look down on him 'cause he's from that part of town.
So despite one discursive thread asserting that Talltown is a socioeconomically homogenous place, there is another that asserts that class difference do exist and are easily identifiable in the discourse about "good" and "bad" qualities and behaviors.

There is another group in Talltown that is a socially-constructed Other, one constructed specifically in opposition to people "from" Talltown, particularly those "born and raised" there. Workers on the natural gas pipeline, known locally as Pipeliners, are talked about in ways that highlight their outsider status. In particular, they are described as troublemakers and described with stories of altercations between young local men and pipeliners.

The Talltown community discourse about sexuality and gender identity is rather evenly split, as to whether or not prejudice and discrimination along these lines exists in Talltown. This discourse reveals the Talltown dominant community norm of heterosexuality, particularly in people's assertions that there are few, if any, non-heterosexuals and people with non-traditional gender identities and expressions in Talltown. For example, looking back on his time growing up in Talltown college student Collin said, "I wasn't really aware of any."

Regarding discrimination based on gender or sexuality, there is the prominent discursive norm that some people will always be prejudiced, perhaps even discriminate against others. As Kendra, a Caucasian high school student in her mid-teens, says, "There are those people that are like, gonna make fun of you and just make school hard for you. But, it's not really like that here because everybody just pretty much accepts people."
Individuals who are openly different in their sexuality or gender (i.e. "looking for it") are likely to experience discrimination. Stephanie, a mother and beautician in her late-twenties said, "I think people would prob'ly pick on them and tease them you know, that sort of thing. So I think it would be harder in that sense." Similarly Maggie, a relative newcomer in her mid-teens, said, "There's like this one, or yeah, 2 guys I guess that are like, bi-sexual. And then like, I hear like, a lot of 'em pickin' on him and tellin' him like, 'Go screw another guy' or somethin' like that when they get mad at him." As a result, Lori, an early twenties entrepreneur with some college education, said, "people hide it when they're in Talltown just because it's not accepted." Interestingly even as Maggie notes the different treatment non-heterosexuals receive, she also downplays the difference by describing these two young men as bi-sexuals, not homosexuals. This is yet another discursive strategy for maintaining the community norm of heterosexuality. Supposedly, homosexual men face more discrimination in Talltown compared to homosexual women, a likely reflection of the hyper-masculine norms of cowboy culture so pervasive in the community. Beth, a divorced high school dropout in her mid-twenties, mentioned that she knows of at least one gay and one lesbian couple in Talltown and that she also knows several people who are bisexual, but she did not make any mention of differential treatment or experience for these individuals. But without having talked to any current Talltown residents who identified as non-heterosexual, I cannot confirm or deny Beth's or anyone else's ideas about what it is like to be a non-heterosexual or person of different gender expression in Talltown. Still, the fact that such people were
not readily available for me to talk to, may say something important. Talk about one supposedly homosexual male student, who left at the beginning of the school year to attend a bigger school in a bigger city, supports the idea that non-heterosexuals are less accepted than heterosexual individual and for this reason, they do not often choose to make their lives in Talltown.

Among adolescents, as might be expected in our society, there is some talk about perceived sexual or gender difference. Brandi, a popular, active church youth group member in her mid-teens said, "They still kinda blend in, but they're still you know, you mention them and it's like, 'Oh.' So they're pretty separated." In Brandi's observation there is not much by way of outright prejudice or discrimination based on sexuality or gender identity, though such differences are noticed. Even non-heterosexuals who were not out were openly speculated about. Jonathan, a lifelong resident except for when he was away getting for his college and graduate education and who is now in his late twenties, points out that the kind of treatment a non-heterosexual or a person with a different gender expression might receive is based in part on how open the person is about it. He said,

There weren't very many [that were openly gay/lesbian or differently gender-expressing]. And I don't know if they had too much trouble. It would pr'y depend on how open they were about it. I'm sure they could have found trouble if they'd wanted, if they were looking for it.

Jonathan's position holds that so long as one is private about these things they need not expect different treatment. This reflects one of the Talltown norms I came to understand as very important: some forms of socially constructed difference, perhaps especially sexuality and gender identity, are best left unmentioned. Ostensibly, when
they are left unmentioned, people can be seen to comply with the norm of community
closeness, and in so doing, use it as a prop in the performance their own position of
belonging within the community.

But norms do not necessarily reflect the realities of people's experience. Jesse,
a gay former resident of Talltown in his early thirties, though he was not out at the
time, reportedly experienced harsh treatment by his peers, especially by the
application of a derogatory nickname.

In each of the forms of socially constructed difference explored in Talltown so
far, certain norms are reinforced by virtue of the recognition of difference. These
include the norms of community closeness, involvement, hard work, and the
traditional family. Class and sexual identification block certain pathways for Talltown
youth, despite what the myth of meritocracy says about our open society. The norms,
acted upon by people, reinforce the Talltown hierarchy. Particularly noteworthy in the
hierarchy, are the extremes, the "good and bad people," those who are "going
somewhere" or "getting stuck."

In this chapter we have looked at the discursive norms by which Talltown youth
are assessed, and which youth strategize with and around, with specific attention to
how youth encounter them. They include the norms of place, including appreciation
for the outdoors and hard work, and norms of community, including closeness,
involvement, and family. This chapter provides the context within which Talltown
youth receive the dominant messages about these norms. Once acquired, these norms
can be used strategically, in the negotiation of social position in local and larger fields.
They can be used to play up, obfuscate, sidestep, swap, delay, and trade positions in the performance of belonging, of fitting in, in Talltown. They are especially useful for those with other cross cutting socially ascribed differences. The discursive maintenance of these norms reveals that, despite having a more open society, there is a lot local discursive work in the manipulation of difference. But even as norms present opportunity to strategize, they are made differently available to some youth, particularly by class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. This experience and what youth do about it, is that which we turn to in the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Youth Findings

In the previous chapter we looked at Talltown, as both place and community, for clues as to how youth come to know, internalize, and embody, whiles others do not, important community and larger field norms. In this chapter our object is youth cultural practice. To understand youth cultural practice we need to account for civic traditions of modern American society. In this context, youth cultural practice is driven by a sense of need and desire to find oneself (Bellah et al. 1996). As they move from childhood to adolescence to emerging adulthood and beyond, youth receive and internalize messages about what it means to belong in different fields. This is the stuff of interaction, strategically practiced to negotiate social position.

If we pay attention to the ways youth experiences are shaped by political-economic and socio-cultural forces, then we can see neoliberal globalization at work. In play and among friends, in love and in family, in education and work, and in community, youth, like adults, negotiate an increasingly competitive political-economic field. Between the local rural and national fields, cultural practice is heavily strategic, and often dependent on the myth of meritocracy.

Across the local and larger fields, norms of education and the cultivation of human capital, especially through college education, maintain the structures of obfuscated, but ongoing inequality. This is the context in which Talltown youth form understandings about who they are in Talltown and who they are beyond it, in both an ascribed and agentive sense. This chapter builds upon the findings of the previous
chapter, specifically regarding Talltown community discourse, highlighting the ways in which Talltown youth interpret and strategically act upon the norms and expectations of both the local and larger fields.

Finding Oneself at Play

Childhood

Talk about Talltown childhoods reflects the discursive norm that Talltown is a good place to raise a family. By extension it is also said to be a good place to be a child. Talltown childhoods embody the ideal of the "priceless" (Zelizer 1985, 2005) childhood, even while retaining some vestiges of a more economically valuable childhood, in the form of chores around the ranch or house. Talltown childhoods also embody the modern childhood ideals of being carefree, with lots of time for playing and learning. Talltown childhoods are also said to offer more freedom in this area than other, non-rural, childhoods. Amy, a Caucasian college graduate in her early thirties, who is married, the mother of several children, and no longer in residence in Talltown, recalled of her childhood there,

I like that there is not a great deal of uh, adult supervision really. So, we weren't ever afraid to go riding bikes on the roads or ride into town to visit our friends, 'cause we didn't live terribly far out of town. And I liked being able to play where there weren't any people.

In this free exploration of and play in and around Talltown, children begin to acquire the local norm of outdoor recreation. Eduardo, an adolescent Hispanic, also discursively enacts this norm in talking about childhood visits to a creek. Amy also
mentions the idea of not being afraid, and in so doing, makes use of themes of Talltown as safe, and thereby family friendly.

The specific activities of childhood vary between individuals and change over the course of one's childhood, though the pace of this change increases as they moved into adolescence. As Dane, a mechanic in his early twenties, said, "We went through phases of stuff. We'd like, skateboard and bike. When I was in like, 6th or 7th grade we'd ride our bikes out and go fishin' 4 times a week." In specific mentions of activities like bike riding, walking to visit friends at their homes, or walking about town, people also reveal that in childhood play, Talltown youth encounter norms of appreciation for the place, and a sense of safety that reinforces community closeness.

Adolescence

As Talltown children become adolescents, their recreation changes to reflect an intensified familiarity with the norms of fields beyond Talltown. As they forge identities beyond those they have within their families, adolescents try out new, increasingly consumer, fields of practice. Some Talltown youth find local entertainment offerings to be lacking. Ann, a relative newcomer who works with youth and is in her early thirties, said of Talltown, "It is a good place to be a kid, but it is not such a good place for a teenager. It's just a little more limited." Here Ann gives an example of the complex discursive norm of "nothing to do." This norm has two distinct meanings. Among youth, in particular, it is levied in a counter-discourse, which suggests that, as Ann said, Talltown may not be such a great place to grow up
once one reaches the adolescence. In its other meaning, it is simply something that
teenagers say, but that they will mostly grow out of, just the growing pains of finding
themselves outside of their families.

The relative isolation of Talltown, geographically and discursively speaking,
combined with its relatively small population, makes it unlikely that many consumer
entertainment options are to be found there. One photovoice participant pointed this
out by saying, "We don't have clubs here, which I'm sad about." A funny
misunderstanding ensued when a second photovoice participant replied, "Yes we do." A
third participant caught on and said, "Oh, like dance clubs." Still, the second person
did not understand, so the person who first mentioned clubs laughed and said, "That's
not what I'm talking about, like raves." To this the second person said, "Waves?"
before finally understanding, at which point laughter ensued and the first person said,
"See, it's so foreign that we don't even know what it is!" Charlie, a university student
in his mid-twenties, described one of the consequences of not having such forms of
youth-friendly consumer entertainment. He said, "There's not really anywhere you
can meet people." Nor are there many places for adolescents to socialize away from
the supervision of parents or teachers. As Eduardo, a Hispanic circular migrant, who
is in his mid-teens, said,

Since it's such a small town, there's really like not much to do...sure we can go
to [the local pizza parlor], chill there for a while, then like, from there go watch
a movie, but then [laughing] since they only show one movie here we, it's
kinda hard to do that.

Some youth internalize the "nothing to do" norm more deeply than others, and
in so doing embody it more than others. They may spend their free time watching
television, playing video games, or on social networking websites. Paul, a middle-aged man who works with youth, reflected on how youth entertainment today is different from what it was when he was young. He said, "You've got computer, you've got video games, you've got everything that keeps a kid inside." Kendra, who was "born and raised" in Talltown resident and is in her mid-teens said, "We usually just rent movies and sit around and listen to music."

Kendra and Brandi, another "born and raised" resident in her mid-teens, both talk about coping with having "nothing to do" by driving around. Cars may be especially important for rural youth because they do not generally have public transportation options that allow them to easily travel beyond the reach of immediate adult supervision. However, if one lives in Talltown proper, and not in the surrounding area, it is only a short walk or bike ride to other destinations in town. Even long distances are not traversable, especially since they do not follow any interstates. But cars are not just about transportation. They are also about having space away from the immediate supervision of parents and most other adults, so long as one does not get pulled over. In suburban and urban places there are more such places in which to be away from this supervision, including public parks and shopping malls. Talltown does have public parks and tennis court, even a swimming pool, but there is still youth talk about wanting more spaces to be with their friends. The fact that the grocery store parking lot and sidewalks become hangout destinations suggests there may be something to this discursive theme.
Holly, who has lived in Talltown since middle-childhood and is in her late teens, suggests that having "nothing to do" drives some Talltown youth to participate in extra curricular activities. She says, "I mean that's what we have to do. I mean, that's how most of us stay out of trouble is by throwin' ourselves into sports." Here Holly reveals a key discursive means by which adolescent social positions are assessed. By participating in extra curricular activities, Talltown youth can avoid other activities that might cause them to be labeled as "trouble." Kendra, who was "born and raised" in Talltown and is in her mid-teens, also notes the idea of "nothing to do." She says, "Outside of school and stuff, besides sports, there's not really anything to do after school."

In the after school hours Talltown adolescent behavior is highly scrutinized and deviance is the assumed default position. There is also deviance during school hours, as when youth resist instruction, but this is generally explained away as a reflection either of individual students' abilities, the amount of encouragement they receive for their studies at home, and how hard they are willing to work. These are the factors used to explain why some adolescents struggle in school, even to the point of resisting the requirement that they be there but cutting class, or getting into confrontations with teachers. After school, there may be no adults present to mitigate "at risk" circumstances. Youth who embody the counter norm of "nothing to do," through their non-involvement in extra curricular activities, are especially said to be "at risk" and "troubled."
Kendra, a lifelong resident who is in her mid-teens said, "It's pretty simple and pretty boring and you just kinda gotta make use of everything that's around you so that you'll have something to do." This can be both good and bad. For Collin, a reportedly hard-partying college student in his early twenties, this is a good thing because it "kind of enhances your imagination to think of fun things to do." Brandi, a lifelong resident who is in her mid-teens and from a well-respected family, also put a positive spin on the lack of things to do and in so doing seems to contradict the experience of people like Collin, who were pretty seriously involved in underage drinking. Brandi said, "There's not a whole lot to do. But you find things to do eventually that are probably a lot safer than if you were in the city." Paula, a middle-aged woman who works with youth, and Eduardo, a Hispanic circular migrant in his mid-teens, point out that there are things for young people to do for entertainment in the Talltown area. The problem is that what Talltown has to offer are not specifically those things, which are popularly important to youth in the U.S. today. There is also little by way of non-school related youth-specific recreation options. As a prominent theme of discourse among those who work with youth and youth themselves, "nothing to do" is a powerful bargaining chip.

There are a number of ways Talltown youth cope with having "nothing to do." One widely adopted strategy is participating in sports, especially through the school, but also through independent clubs, which the school cannot fund. The vast majority of Talltown adolescents do seem to be involved sports, often one each season. Collin, a lifelong resident except when he has been away at college, who is a member of a
well "named" family, who is now in his early twenties, says that just about everyone who goes out for a team gets to play. He explains that this is necessary in order to have the minimum numbers needed for the various teams. Lori, a member of a large and long-established, family, who is an entrepreneur with some college coursework who is in her early twenties, and Maggie, a lifelong resident in her mid-teens, describe the school athletic teams as not particularly competitive and suggest that this is why most everyone who goes out for a team, makes the team. The idea of there being "nothing to do" avoided through adolescents' embodiment of the norm of community involvement, especially in sports, but also in other clubs, and church youth groups.

Adolescents can also embody the norm of appreciation for Talltown's landscape and recreational opportunities through participation in these activities. 

Eduardo, a Hispanic circular migrant through Talltown, who is in his mid-teens, said,

> When it's snowing we'll go sledding. Like, just go do outdoor activities like snowboarding, sledding, skiing. And like when it's sunny we'll go to the pool. And if not the pool we'll go skateboarding, anything that can occupy us...basically outdoor things.

Kendra, a lifelong resident in her mid-teens, and Stephanie, a mother and beautician in her late twenties, talk about sledding as a favorite outdoor activity. Winter activities, also including skiing and snowboarding, are particularly popular, and are often among the things people say they appreciate about Talltown, that opportunity for these activities is so near at hand. Ellen, a relative newcomer in her early teens, and Paul, a middle-aged man who works with youth, describe skiing as a favored youth activity. Ellen has dreams of someday being a skiing and snowboarding instructor, something she can imagine herself doing in the Talltown area. Dane, a mechanic, who has taken
some online college courses and is in his early twenties, and Paula, a middle-aged woman working with youth, talk about skateboarding as a popular youth activity.

Skateboarding is perhaps more prominent in Talltown discourse than one might expect. The reason for this is that there have long been plans for a skate park in Talltown, but it has not yet been built. On the one hand there is talk about the skate park project as an example of how the Talltown community listens to and provides for the needs of its youth. On the other hand, there is talk about the skate park as doomed project, which has been under various leadership over the years, losing some of its funding along the way, apparently perpetually stuck in the early, even planning, stages of the project. Concrete was finally poured this last year, but even this step is a small one. There is as yet no end date set for the project. When the weather turned cold after the first of the concrete had been poured, and the rest subsequently had to wait until things warmed back up months later.

The most important feature of Talltown adolescent play is that it is so organized. There are a surprising number of extra-curricular programs at school, through churches, and 4-H. In participating in these activities, Talltown adolescents embody the norm of community involvement. What seems like a vast majority of Talltown youth participate in some kind of organized extra curricular activity, especially sports and 4-H, with its annual culmination at Fair. What interviewees told me seems to support this observation. Lifelong resident, Brandi, who is in her mid-teens, says, "Most of my friends play sports." Holly, a resident of Talltown since middle childhood, who is now in her late teens, and Kendra, a lifelong resident in her
mid-teens, talk about most Talltown youth participating in sports. Dane, a mechanic in his early twenties says, "A lot of kids played sports, like, the majority of the kids played sports." Similarly Chad, a relative newcomer, husband, father, and police officer, in his early thirties, says, "Most all of the kids are involved in sports." The same can easily be said of 4-H, as I observed for myself at Fair.

The norm of community involvement combats the counter-norm of "nothing to do" and demonstrates compliance with an important Talltown norm, and thus belonging. Bringing a 4-H animal to Fair, for instance, may require months of hard work, depending on the animal. Second, as Jenny, a married mother who works in Talltown youth programming and is in her mid-twenties, says, such activities encourage, "positive youth development" so that "youth gain a sense of belonging" in the process of "fostering relationships between youth and adults to make them productive citizens as they develop." This is the payoff for rural communities. Adolescents who are involved in extra curricular activities are prepared to be "productive citizens" as adults, who will hopefully return to Talltown after getting a college education. In assessing adolescents' social positions it is not so important that an individual participate in sports or in 4-H in and of themselves. What is important, is what that participation symbolizes and what norms it gives the adolescent a chance to embody. Participation in 4-H is a symbolic reflection of community agricultural heritage. It provides adolescents with opportunities to embody the norms of hard work, and in the case of bringing an animal to Fair, to demonstrate responsibility. Participation in sports symbolizes the healthiness and wholesomeness, but also
toughness so idealized in the rural community. With its team emphasis, participation in sports also reinforces the norm of community closeness. In these ways adolescent who are involved in school and other extra curricular activities are put into discourse as "going somewhere."

Adolescents who are "stuck in a rut" and "trouble" are positioned in Talltown community discourse as embodying, through near, if not complete, fault of their own, the norm of "nothing to do." This is said to be especially true of those who break laws by using alcohol and drugs. High school dropout Beth, who is now in her mid-twenties, speaks to the experience of high school students today, and to her own experiences at that age. She says,

Here you're, it's limited for the kids and they end up getting in a lot of trouble or, you know doing a lot of drinking or whatever. I know, 'cause I did a lot of drinking when I was growin' up you know, in high school. I still do [Laughs] but you know, there's just nothin' here. I mean, we have a bowling alley that is so out of date that it's you know, and there's just not a lot of things for them to do. I know I just cruised around a lot.

For Beth, having "nothing to do" for leisure is still a reason to turn to alcohol for entertainment. Charlie, a college student in his early twenties described to me as a "partier," and Kendra, a lifelong resident in her mid-teens, suggested that underage drinking is not so widespread in Talltown as to be problematic, except of course for those who run into the zero tolerance policies of schools and the legal system. Allison, a 20 year-old college student who did not drink in high school, expresses a mixed opinion. She said, "I wouldn't say it's problematic. I know it's widespread and I know it's done a lot."
Talltown community discourse about underage drinking includes a range of references to how widespread it is. Collin, a college student in his early twenties from a well-respected family, and Charlie, estimate that around half of youth drink underage. Chad, a relative newcomer, father, and police officer, says, "Good and bad kids are all doin' it; there are enabling parents everywhere." Underage drinking is said to take place both in homes in or around town and in well-isolated spots out of town. Chad points out that youth who drink in town and stay put may be somewhat less likely to be caught. He also says that some know what time state and city police stop patrolling each night and stay put until later, presumably still intoxicated.

Another theme in the Talltown discourse of about adolescent drinking is that the consequences of underage drinking are more strict for some than they are for others. Consequences are said to vary depending on one's family and "name," and how much money one's family has. Holly, who has lived in Talltown since middle childhood and is in her late teens, describes a recent incident where a group of girls got caught drinking underage and,

The one who had money didn't get in trouble. But the ones who didn't got in trouble. And they got [charged with Minor In Possession] and weren't allowed to play [sports] anymore. But [the one who had money] yep, you bet your bottom dollar she didn't get in trouble. Um, which is really weird 'cause she was in the car, totally drunk too.

Other reasons that consequences for underage drinking might vary are said to include cases where a young person had made a name for themselves in school sports, or had a family that is well-established and liked, or whose parents were friends with the
authority figures in town and in school. These adolescents were said to be less likely
to face serious consequences for underage drinking.

As one might expect some youth are more into this social scene than others
and involvement may change as one approaches college. Late adolescent Ben used to
"party," drink and smoke marijuana, daily, though today he is no longer doing either at
all. Ben is trying to finish high school on a high academic note so that he can succeed
in his plans to go to college. Allison is a college student and member of a sorority and
talked about why she was not interested in drinking while in high school. She says, "I
was, I guess termed one of the goody-two-shoes who didn't drink, didn't party, didn't
do stuff like that." Hannah, another college student, also did not drink while in high
school. Allison at least, does not abstain from alcohol today.

There are certain occasions when even adolescents who are have been non-
drinkers come out to the parties. On such occasions the parties themselves are larger
and more numerous. One such occasion is graduation, something common in much of
the U.S. today. Another is Fair. Both youth and adults have a discursive norm of Fair
as a time or heightened alcohol consumption. One couple, parents of several
adolescent children, told me regarding Fair, in particular the destruction derby, to
expect people to arrive with one person, get drunk and leave with another. "It's kind of
like Burning Man. What happens at the derby stays at the derby." My observations at
the Destruction derby seem to confirm what I had perceived in discourse. For
example, during a break in the Destruction derby a group of young men sitting just
behind me started talking about a party out in the country, which they had been at just
the night before. One of the young men said, "I would have blown [I understand him to be referring to a breathalyzer test] until about 1pm the next day." Another young man then said, "Me too." Another said, "I walked through the fire at some point last night and ruined my shoes." Someone else asked, "Is there anything tonight?"

Emerging Adulthood

 Whereas Talltown adolescents may say there is nothing for them to do for fun, compared to emerging adults they have a tremendous number of options, certainly more options of the organized variety. Emerging adults of Talltown do not have the same opportunity for continuing in team sports, unless perhaps they go away to college, though some emerging adults who stay or return to Talltown are involved with high school sports as volunteer coaches. There is no community theater in Talltown, though there is a choir, open to anyone in the community, and of which relative newcomer Ann, who is in her early thirties, is a part. And yet, organized play remains important in emerging adulthood and, as it does in adolescence, it reinforces the norms of community involvement and closeness.

 Attending high school sporting events provides both entertainment and a chance to socialize. Matt, an unmarried teacher and resident of Talltown for less than five years says,

 Most of the big social outings are actually all school events. I mean when you have no professional sports around, no real college sports around, the football games, the basketball games, the volleyball games... my gosh I participate in almost every single school thing, dodge ball tournaments and basketball tournaments.
He goes on to point out that other community, particularly charity events, provide emerging adults with an opportunity to have fun and to socialize. Matt specifically frames such events as a rural small town substitute to "a bar or a club in a big city."

He says,

> You go to a lot of charity events. Charities become a huge thing in a small town as social events. They're not just raising money but a lot of people find those as ways to go out and socialize as much as going out to a bar or a club in a big city for entertainment on an evening. We have tons of charities that do those things because they know people will come to them because it's a social event. It's a chance to gather, see people that you usually wouldn't...usually there's something every weekend.

In his mention of seeing people one usually does not, Matt may be eluding to socializing for the purposes of finding romantic partners. Organizations putting on these events know people will attend because they otherwise have a few opportunities to socialize with people they do not see on a regular basis, certainly fewer such opportunities compared to places with larger populations. Ann, a graduate degree-holding woman in her early thirties, feels she ought to attend certain events out of a sense of "obligatory socialization," which she describes as, "community events that for one reason or another I should prob'ly be a part of, or be seen at." In this way Matt and Ann are both very skilled performers of the norms of community involvement and closeness.

For emerging adults age twenty-one and over there is one additional entertainment and socialization option, the bar scene. Listening to the discourse about this scene, some emerging adults, especially non-drinkers, are heard to have no interest in going to a bar. Others, particularly those who work with youth, feel that
because of their job they should not be seen at the bar, so when they do have a drink, they do so in the confines of their own homes, or the homes of friends. Even emerging adults who do not work with youth or in jobs where they feel obliged to keep certain appearances, occasionally talk about being judged for having been at the bar. Allison's view is that that those Talltown youth have been drinkers in high school go off to college and continue to be drinkers. She says,

I think it kinda continues in the same vein, but actually coming to college and seeing the culture of youth here, as well as in Talltown. I'm like, "Wow, there really is a high prevalence of youth drinking." But then again I also term it, "Oh, well we're in college now, we can do whatever we want." And alcohol's not hard to get a hold of. You know, I'm in a sorority and the frats hold parties every week. Every Thursday, every weekend. It's like, "Oh, this is a pretty normal event. No big deal." Um, but for some of my friends it just kind of continued.

Those emerging adults who do participate in the Talltown bar scene have three options. The colloquial way of referring to going to the bar, is "going up town," as mid-twenties high school dropout Beth explained to me. Matt, a relative newcomer and teacher in his late twenties, says,

We'll go to the bar, lots of times you'll be at a friend's house for a few hours and then decide to go out to the bar for a few hours or something. So we'll change that up in terms of social outings and what we decide to do.

Or as Beth puts it, "It just depends on who's there." In other words, "going up town" is not something Talltown emerging adults do just because it is an available consumer entertainment option. They go in order to socialize with particular people, especially those with whom they do not socialize at home. In this way, emerging adult bar patrons, are actually embodying the norm of community closeness. Because this is not
the most high profile way to embody a Talltown norm, it may get overlooked in community discourse.

On some occasions there will be more than the regulars at any one of the three local bars. The newest bar, built especially to tap into pipeliner dollars, regularly has live music, and as Beth points out, "will have the music or at least have the juke box that if they're not having a live band, you can play the music" and that, she felt drew a pretty good crowd. Matt, a teacher in his late twenties, points out that during wedding season, around the holidays, and at Fair, the bars offer chances to socialize with youth from Talltown who now reside elsewhere but are back for a visit. He says,

It all depends on what we think the crowd's gonna be like there, what's happening for the weekend. If there's a wedding in town...you can expect the bar to be filled with people that you're going to socialize with. If there's not something gong on other than that, probably just gonna take a big guess at who might be out. So it's a lot based on seasonal things. You know, the summer tends to be a little bit more fun to go out because there's people that are my age out because they're here for the fire season, they're here for various reasons for the summer time and so you get to see a lot of people that're your own age that you know. Versus, during the winter time, those people, those kids are either, some have gone back to school, the seasonal firefighters have moved to wherever area they came from or, aren't as readily comin' out and things like that so, it's very much a seasonal thing sometimes about when [laughs] when things are more active socially than others times.

Much like involvement in events hosted by community groups, going out to the local bars occasionally, with good social justification, is a kind of emerging adult play that, like the play of adolescents, embodies the norms of community closeness and involvement.
Finding Oneself Among Friends

Talltown discourse suggests that those who grow up in Talltown together, particularly those who are "born and raised," develop special friendships with their peers, friendships almost like a family relationship. In this way people born and raised in Talltown have ready-made friend groups, so long as everyone continues to reside in Talltown. These friendships may be lasting, but they may yet be one of two types of friend. Brad, a teacher in his late twenties, who is also a member of a large and historically established Talltown family, suggests that youth who leave Talltown, particularly for college, will go on to make, "true friends" rather than "friends of convenience." We might also venture to say that "friends of convenience" are more than a social necessity in Talltown. Talltown friendship is also a field in which youth can embody the norms of community closeness and involvement. Relative newcomers may find themselves temporarily popular, or at least the focus of temporary interest upon arrival in Talltown, but they will have to prove their belonging with the successful embodiment of Talltown norms, in order to really break into social circles and make friends. Regardless of when or how youth came to live in Talltown, finding oneself in friends in Talltown reflects one's embodiment of norms, either dominant or counter. Friend groups therefore, can be looked to as sharing both cultural practice and social position.
Childhood and Adolescence

Looking back with the perspective of a high school graduate and new mother, Julie says,

I was at the same school my entire, I mean, from Kindergarten to 8th grade I was in the same school. And then from Freshman year to Senior year same school. I think that's really important to make lasting connections.

Here Julie is referencing the Talltown norm of community closeness, which she characterizes as deriving from the experience of being raised in one place with more or less the same community members. The norm of community closeness is also reinforced by discourse about childhood friendships being the product of friendships between parents, such as between fellow church members or employees. Hannah, now a college student in her early twenties, looks back and describes this in her own life.

My whole group of friends we had like the mom's group. It was all the moms and all of the kids were at the same ages and we were all from the same, we all went to the same church, except for a couple moms and kids. Um, and like, that was our church and like, all the kids that like, went to the Catholic church all were part of the same group. Um, and I think there was a lot of that.

But there is a counter norm in this area. Ben, for example, is in his late-teens and from a very low-income household. Ben reports to have been aware of how he was different from other children, particularly with regard to their clothing.

And yet, throughout childhood, Talltown youth play with mostly undertaken with others who are conveniently located, both physically and socially. Their playmates are siblings, neighbors, classmates, and children of their parents' friends and they socialize at school and church and in neighborhoods and homes. This remains
mostly true into adolescence, where youth still socialize in smaller friend groups in smaller settings, like the bowling alley, the movie theater, a church, a house, a car, the grocery store parking lot or one of the few restaurants in town. This can also help downplay class differences. If there are few consumer entertainment options to be had, then it will be less obvious that some are accessing them more easily than others.

In the U.S., adolescence can be a difficult time for parents and children. One parent I talked with, Gary, describes his late-adolescent daughter, as "struggling to find herself" and "difficult." In particular, he worries about what influence other young people might have on his daughter. He seems to think this was a significant risk by the way he talked about "too many" troubled Talltown youth from "broken homes." Adolescents make social distinctions amongst themselves too. Beginning around the time one starts middle school, adolescents divide themselves into distinct social groups, usually small and formed on the basis of shared interests. 

Although discourse about Talltown adolescent social groups includes a number of named and describable examples, the dominant norm here is that Talltown youth social groups are essentially like those all over the U.S., but perhaps less strictly divided. Megan, a homemaker in her late twenties, says, "It's just kind a the same as what you see in the movies." In other words, 

You have all the, the really popular girls. Um, the ones that maybe weren't so popular. The ones that um, were good at their studies. Um and then you had, you know the football teams and the basketball teams and you know, the guys who were good at their studies, and then you know, the outcasts.

Or as Collin, a lifelong resident and current college student puts it, "They're kind of, I guess different than what you see from like, a TV kind of clique, but we had our own
small town versions of the pop culture cliques." But in general, Talltown discourse about adolescent social groups included the same broad reference points that can be found in U.S. culture broadly, the popular group(s), "the outcasts," and any number of small, intermediate, interest-based groups. This is a social hierarchy youth and adults are aware of, largely because it is a popular culture trope, but it is also a social hierarchy that Talltown youth use to strategically negotiate position with one another. Jonathan, a returned college graduate from a very well-respected family, gets to the agentive actionable side of this positioning in describing what the various adolescent social groups did when he was in school. He says, "There was kind of, there more the popular group. They did a lot of student council. And then there's an athletic group. Then I, my class had a pretty big chunk of uninspired students, to put it nicely." Dane, a mechanic in his early twenties, gives a similar description of the Talltown adolescent social landscape with more involved youth, particularly those involved in school sports, at the top. He says,

We were friends with everyone. But like, then there's the, the jocks I guess would be, kids that all played sports. And then all the kids that smoked weed in high school, they usually all just hung out together. Then, what other cliques are there? That was about it and everyone else just kinda ran around with everyone else.

Charlie, a college student in his early twenties, and Wendy, a bartender in her mid-twenties, talk about popularity as something that can be achieved through sports. As Dane, who is a mechanic and in his early twenties, says, "Once you start playin' sports, people they start liking you more. You become friends with almost everybody." In these ways adolescents strategize with various discursive norms.
In their efforts to group themselves socially, adolescents reinforce the idea that, in Talltown, one's social status is based on what one does. This is why students who are active in extra-curricular activities, especially sports, are said to be most popular, in the sense of having the highest among their peers. Popularity itself can be mobilized in support of the idea that one gets what one works for. Lifelong resident and college student Collin describes the popular group members as the people who are "more social." Allison, a lifelong resident and college student in her early twenties identifies "the Baptists" as a popular group, referring to a group of adolescents who were all members of the same youth group. Also in this rural community with a ranching and cowboy character, Talltown adolescent discourse recognizes another high status social group, that of "ranching kids" and "cowboys," who like all other high status adolescents, are recognizable for what they do.

Other than being described as "the athletes," or "jocks" or having "good names," the popular crowd for Talltown adolescents is primarily made up of "the preppies," who are mostly adolescents from households of relatively higher socioeconomic status. These youth are comply with educational norms most easily and are more involved in the school than their peers of lower socioeconomic status. Kendra, who was "born and raised" in Talltown and is in her mid-teens, does not see any differences between the popular group and others, except that members of the popular group come from relatively wealthier families.

Adolescents in the popular crowd might also have status by virtue of ascribed characteristics, such as having a good family "name" or based on the popularity of an
older sibling. In this pattern of adolescent popularity, we can perceive a social reinforcement of middle-class norms, particularly socioeconomic norms. In this regard, Talltown really is quite like the U.S. society at large.

Those who belong to the more popular adolescent social groups are often those who are looked upon and treated most favorably in the community. Lori, who is an entrepreneur and member of a well "named" family in her early twenties, talks about how youth in the popular group "can get away with a little bit more." She also mentions that they, especially the athletes, are more well-known and receive more attention in the school and in the community, a fact easily observed in a brief perusal of any particular edition of the Talltown weekly paper. Dane, lifelong resident and mechanic who is in his early twenties, also talks about this norm in his mention of the extra attention and privileges he felt athletes got from teachers. Dennis, a Marine in his early twenties, also talks about this norm. He says, "Everyone knows that the more popular kids are you know, treated differently," and goes on to say that when he and another young man left to join the military, there was a little blurb about them in the paper, which he compared to "big things about Talltown sports or interviews from star athletes."

At the bottom of the Talltown adolescent social heap are the "outcasts." Collin, a college student in his early twenties who has been a lifelong resident of Talltown, has a somewhat kinder name for this group than do many of his peers. He refers to them as "the shy group." Adolescents with "outcast" status may not constitute a group, in terms of internal organization through friendship. Many "outcasts" are,
rather, "loners." Importantly, these youth are characterized as not participating in the adolescent social field. They embody the counter norm of non-participation. In this way they are looked upon as relative failures in the embodiment the norms of community closeness and involvement. Sam is one such young man. He is in his mid-teens, and struggles in school to the point that he is behind his age peers. He is also from one of the homes parents might describe as "broken" and he does not, I was told, receive much encouragement or instruction there. In school I very rarely saw him speak to others, unless it was to a teacher who was working with him one-on-one. He did laugh at the jokes of other students, but other than that he seemed to go through his day without interaction with other adolescents. Sam goes through his days in ways that counter most of the dominant norms of the Talltown community, in particular participation in the competition for status.

Those "outcasts" who are not "loners" in the individual sense, though as a group they may not socialize with others, are described as the "weed smokers," or the "goths," or "emo kids." In the explicit and tacit links to drug use, these adolescents are ascribed statuses positions of "trouble." They are seen as engaging in, or at least at serious risk of engaging in, unhealthy, dangerous, and illegal activities. In the context of such an assessment, these adolescents may come to resent the norms of community involvement and hard work in education, and thus choose to embody norms, such as of drug use, that are counter to those dominant in Talltown.

The vast majority of Talltown adolescents fall into the middle social strata. Included are those, as Jonathan, a returned emerging adult who is from a family with a
"name," describes. "straight-laced." Jonathan's younger brother Collin, who is in his early twenties, also mentions the "nerds." There is also an auto-oriented group, which early twenties college student Charlie, and Lori, a mid-twenties entrepreneur, call "the Carb Crew," who were so named because, as Lori, an mid-twenties member of a large and historically established family, says, they "go mudding. Like those kind of kids. I don't know, dirt bikers" and 4-wheelers, of which Beth, a high school dropout who is now in her mid-twenties, was one. She says,

   One thing we used to do is we'd all go up in the hills and four-wheel. That was every weekend. Loved it. But then the cops finally said [with a slight whine in her voice], "Oh no, you're tearing everything up." So that wasn't allowed anymore.

There are also "the mechanics," who spend time together working on their vehicles, especially Destruction derby vehicles. There are also sport-oriented youth social groups, though these are subject to reshuffling depending on the season. Holly, a resident of Talltown since middle childhood who is now in her late teens, talks about a group of girls called "the Forever Freshmen," who had been so named for their immature behavior, but whom had since adopted the name and begun using it themselves. There are many more Talltown adolescent social groups that are not so named, but instead described in relation to the interest that brings them together like, "the science kids" or "the theater kids." What is significant about these groups, and indeed similar about them, is the way they define themselves in relation to the popular and outcast groups. In this way they reinforce the norms of the adolescent social scene in Talltown, particularly its two extremes, people will describe their social group growing up, first by saying that they were "not super popular, but not
Talltown community discourse about adolescent social groups further reinforces the norm of community closeness in characterizing adolescent social groups, as less fixed than in larger schools. Collin, a lifelong resident and college student in his early twenties, says they are "necessarily flexible." Similarly Mark, a mechanic in his early twenties, suggests that there is a link between the idea of the close-knit community and a supposed lack of social groups among Talltown adolescents. This has the effect of making specific social groups "hard to describe" as lifelong resident and college student, Charlie, points out. Other than "the usual cliques" Talltown community discourse may not specify other adolescent social groups, although adolescent discourse does. Instead people describe social experiences in adolescence as "average," and "laid-back." Discourse about adolescent social groups further reinforces the norm of community closeness with assertions that Talltown friends are like family, in terms of both closeness and the functional helpful aspects of the relationship.

The adolescent social structure reinforces the norm of community closeness with the help of a key people that facilitate the relationships between Talltown adolescent social groups. Through those Maggie, a relative newcomer to Talltown in her mid-teens, and Megan, a lifelong resident and stay-at-home mother in her late twenties, call "social butterflies" and Brandi, a lifelong resident and teenager, calls "connectors" an overall feeling of community is maintained among adolescents and the norm of community closeness is reinforced. Brandi identifies herself as one of
those people who maintain connections between the various social groups. In her case, this happens largely through sports. Depending on what sport is in season, those are the people she spends her free time with. In this way she maintains connections, if not with equally sustained intensity, with several different youth social groups. Brandi also seems to wrestle with this necessary social flexibility among Talltown youth.

When I asked her to tell me about the social groups at her school she said,

> It's pretty separated. Like, you have, actually it's not. Because you have people who do drama, band, and then sports as well. And so it's not like big schools where you have the athletes and the band geeks, but it's basically, it's still from elementary school. Like, I moved around and I changed but, you still have the same groups of preppy and kind of the drama/band geeks and it kind of melts together at times. I have a lot of sports friends that I don't hang out with usually and we're completely different. But um, it's actually kind of blended. People talk to anybody they want.

Here Brandi voices the difficulty she has in identifying the distinct social groups she has encountered, and embodying the norm of community closeness.

**Emerging Adulthood**

Friends become yet more important normative influences when youth leave their household of origin. Friends may be one's primary social system, sometimes also serving as members of a household as in the case of roommates, or as dorm-mates and classmates for those who go off to college. For emerging adults who continue to reside with parents, friends may still be the group with whom the emerging adult spends most of his/her free time. Friends are more than just people to spend time with, they are people who share interests and experiences, which is why it is so easy to confide in them and to relax, have fun, talk, celebrate, and commiserate with them,
and why they are an important source of feedback about our performance of certain norms.

Emerging adults living in Talltown face a particular set of challenges in finding themselves through friends. For people who have lived in the community most, if not all their lives, membership in social circles may be well assured thanks to family connections and many years in the local school system. There will likely be some shared interests in these friend groups, though they are likely to be the sort of thing one can do relatively easily in Talltown, particularly something outdoorsy that is widely popular and reinforces the norm of appreciate for the Talltown landscape. There will also be some shared experiences in these friend groups.

Megan, homemaker in her late twenties, notes how the experience of parenthood shapes friend groups. She names "your soccer moms, and your moms who are artsy and crafty." Stephanie, a mother and beautician in her late twenties, and Wendy, a bartender in her mid-twenties, note that emerging adults with children tend to socialize around activities for their kids. This is the embodiment of the norm of the traditional family.

Discourse about emerging adult social groups reinforces the norm of community closeness through socialization with coworkers. Members of the seasonal fire crews spend time together, as do people who work together at the hospital or in the schools. Socializing with coworkers is an especially important avenue to the embodiment of community closeness, for emerging adults that are federal employees, who are often relative newcomers to Talltown.
Discourse about emerging adult social groups also reflects the norm of socializing outside of one's immediate age group. Ann, a relative newcomer to Talltown, who is dating a man from a well "named" family and is in her early thirties, describes the situation in which Talltown emerging adults find themselves.

So part of the way the Talltown demographics are a little strange is that there are not as many people in their 30s as are representative in the United States as a whole. And so that makes any sort of social grouping a little bit off or, or unusual in some way. And so we um, you know, we've found ourselves to be a part of like interlocking social groups, but for us I think the defining characteristic is that...there's no young children. Either the children have grown and are out of the house or ...there's no children. And then the people with young children, I think, tend to socialize together. And there are some spaces, especially in the um, I would say, federal employees and teachers where there's some connections in between those... but in the last 3 years there's like, lots of little kids under the age of 3 here all of a sudden. And so some of like, like the, the children havers you know, I think spend more time together, but the groups sort of overlap a little bit and are at similar events.

Ann's comments reveal that a certain amount of social group flexibility is necessary for Talltown emerging adults, just as it is for adolescents. Lori, who has some college, is from a well "named" family, and is in her early twenties, supports this idea. She says,

I think pretty much when you come back, you kinda get to start over. Or it feels that way. You might talk about how it was in high school, but everyone pretty much gets along.

Stephanie, a mother and beautician in her late twenties, suggests that there are youth who leave Talltown after high school and those youth stay, and also those who "are city" and those who live and work on family ranches.

If the pool of friends in which to find oneself in friendship is rather small among emerging adults in Talltown, it is an ocean for those who leave. In moving
away from one’s small rural hometown, one opens oneself up to the opportunity to make new friends. Moreover, one can make friends of different sorts, for different reasons. In leaving one’s rural community and encountering more and different people, the friendships forged need not be limited by convenience. They can be freely formed on the bases of shared interests and experiences. Allison, a lifelong resident and college student, has found she has perhaps more things in common with others from Talltown from whom she once thought herself quite different. She says,

   In fact some of my friends that I wasn't even close to in high school actually came to Oregon State and I've become way closer with them now since then because of that.

It took going away to the same college for Allison to realize this, but in doing so she too manages to embody the norm of community closeness. Wendy, a bartender in her mid-twenties, concurs to a point when she says of running into people after having graduated high school when at least one of the parties has left the community for a time,

   They'll come up and apologize for being mean and it's like, 'Dude we were in 6th grade.' [Laughs] "We've grown up. We're kind of past that.' [Laughs] And there's other that still treat you like the same.

Here Wendy hints at the possibility that some Talltown youth will remain socially distant as they progress into emerging adulthood, that they will remain ineffective in the embodiment of the norm of community closeness. Late twenties homemaker Megan agreed when she says, "I definitely think there's still cliques." Others, like Lori, who came home most weekends she was in college and socialized with other Talltown youth while she was on campus, and Charlie, who lives with relatives and
friends from Talltown of his same age while he is at college, continue to embody the norm of community closeness even when they have moved away.

Finding Oneself in Love

Puppy Love

As Talltown youth leave childhood and progress through adolescence they begin to form another kind of relationship, the dating relationship. This is particularly noticeable in the high school. As Kendra, a lifelong resident in her mid-teens points out, some students seem to devote a lot of time and energy to dating relationships, while others do not. Looking back on her adolescent experience, Stephanie, a mother and beautician in her late twenties, determines that there were plenty of potential dating partners to choose from. Charlie, a lifelong resident and current college student, and Dane, a lifelong resident and mechanic, disagree, assessing dating scene "slim pickin's."

Among the most prominent themes in Talltown discourse about adolescent dating, is the idea that it is difficult to look at someone romantically, when one has grown up with them. Brandi says there are,

Not a whole lot of choices... I think [high school dating] happens just as much as [in] any other town, but the thing is, the people in your class, you've known since kindergarten. So it's kind of hard to look at 'em in any different light but immature and just cooties.

One could argue that marriages between locals strengthens the community, but if those marriages end poorly, as so many in the U.S. do, the community would have to deal with the fallout. So in a way, both looking outside of the local community for dating
partners, and the feeling as though dating people one grew up with is "weird," protect the norm of community closeness.

And yet walking down the halls, "Senior Hall" especially, one notices that there are a lot of public displays of affection in the halls and on grounds. Some of these displays are quite "intense," at least when teachers and administrators are not present. At a glance making the hallway rounds during passing periods, it seems a great number of Talltown youth have paired off into dating relationships, and not only the Seniors. One norm of Talltown adolescent dating is that relationships may happen across somewhat wider of an age range than might be expected in a population where persons of each age group had more individuals of their own age who were potential dating partners. This has its limits though and occasionally one will hear about problematic dating pairs between students seen as much too old to date one so young.

As Kendra, a lifelong resident who is in her mid-teens pointed out, not everyone is interested in dating as an adolescent. For example, Maggie, a relative newcomer in her mid-teens, calls the dating scene "overrated." She suggests that relationships begun in high school do not last, while Collin, a lifelong resident who is now in college, who is still dating his high school sweetheart, suggests that they do. Couples that do make it embody the Talltown norm of family, even if they arrive at this norm by a somewhat shorter course than has become the ideal in the contemporary transition to adulthood.
What I Like About You

One consequence of the small dating pool of emerging adults, and one discursive theme, is a dating "cycle." Information travels quickly and widely in a small town like Talltown, and as relationships are generally not secret, people tend to know the histories of who has dated whom. It is said that if a person stays on the market long enough in Talltown, sooner or later they will have exhausted most of their options, as will their single friends. According to Collin, a college student who is dating his high school sweetheart, the dating cycle is especially visible if one looks as far back as middle or high school.

There are certain times of year when the dating pool fluctuates in size. One of which emerging adult bartender Wendy noted, is when the college students are home on breaks. Relative newcomer and single teacher Matt, notes that fluctuations occur during Fair, at during times when universities are not in session, or at times of special events, like weddings. This is when those who grew up in Talltown, but have gone away to college, come back to visit. Coming home in this way may affect the dating scene, but the most important facet of these homecomings is that they reinforce the norm of community closeness.

Recently the Talltown dating pool has also grown, at least for heterosexual women, with the addition of the pipeliners to the dating scene, as Wendy notes. Beth, a high school dropout now in her mid-twenties is one who is dating a pipeliner, living with him in fact. Still, ideas about class status may prevent this population influx from much impacting the dating pool for some Talltown women. Single teachers or
nurses, for example, may be looking for college educated partners and so not consider pipeliners suitable and in so doing enact middle-class norms of college education and project middle-class norms of family.

When people talk about the dating scene for Talltown emerging adults, they reinforce the idea that, Stephanie, a divorced mother in her late twenties, said it is "hard to meet people" when one is an emerging adult in Talltown. In Talltown it is important to be open to meeting a dating partner wherever they might present themselves. It might be at the bar, through the introduction by a friend, at any community event. Dane, a mechanic with some college education, who has been a lifelong resident of Talltown, Lori, an entrepreneur with some college education from a large "named" family, both talked about the importance of "putting yourself out there" socially in order to make the most of a limited dating pool. As Matt, a relative newcomer and single teacher, said, "If you sit home, yeah, your chances are very rare that you're gonna find a friend or somebody to go out with."

The dating scene for emerging adults varies widely depending on whether or not one is in Talltown or residing elsewhere, as when away at college. Those who leave Talltown find a much bigger dating pool, while those who remain continue to work with limited options. In the discourse about dating among emerging adults who stay, the most prominent theme is how limited it the pool is. Moreover, as Jonathan, a single, lifelong resident, except for the time he was in college and graduate school, who is from a well "named" family, notes, the further one gets from high school, the less acceptable recent high school graduates are as dating partners.
Gossip is a particular form of discourse used to reinforce community norms for those who date. Eduardo, a Hispanic circular migrant in his mid-teens, notes that gossip, or at least news traveling fast, is a fact of life in small communities. Holly, a resident since middle childhood, who is now in her late teens, goes so far as to refer to gossip as a form of "local entertainment." When dating in Talltown then, there is always the risk that a spat between partners, or worse, an unplanned pregnancy, or messy breakup, will not only be personally difficult to deal with, it may also have to be dealt with publicly.

The dating scene for those who go away to college is another thing all together. Emerging adults who go to college have more dating options than there are in Talltown, regardless of the size of educational institution they might be attending. Jonathan, who is single and has a graduate degree, observes that most of those who go away to college and return do so with a spouse or partner. As Wendy, who is divorced and in her mid-twenties, notes, going away to college and coming back with a spouse contributes nothing to the dating prospects of single Talltown emerging adults who stay. Moreover, it may actually represent a lost opportunity for an emerging adults who stay to perhaps marry people who left and returned and thereby achieve upward social and economic mobility.

The One

There are several notable trends in Talltown discourse about emerging adults and "settling down" into marriage. Single emerging adults talk about this traditional
marker of adulthood in several ways. There are those who talk about "not rushing things" in their path to marriage, like college students Bill, Charlie, Kaelyn, Karen, and Kristy, Marine Dennis, and Karie, a college graduate and former Talltown resident now living in a big city. In talking about and living this single life, they embody the dominant and privileged norm of prolong identity exploration, particularly in the areas of dating, marriage, and family and in so doing, lay claim to a more middle-class status position.

Susan talks about remaining unmarried, but not because she is not in a serious relationship, but as somewhat of a choice. When asked if she thought she would like to be married in the future, Susan said,

It depends... Its kind of an interesting topic in my life - my significant other and I have been together for five years this may. And he's totally like of the "I don't ever need to get married" camp. And I'm like, "Sure I don't mind getting married," so we're kind of just - its not that he's the wrong guy, he's just not into it. So we're just kind of floating along. And that's fine.

Here Susan shows that she is not "settling" for this relationship. To do so would be to essentially cease identity exploration in the realm of romantic relationships and commit, without the traditional symbolic commitment, to her partner. It would mean admitting that the end of emerging adulthood and the beginning of full-on adulthood were near. It would also mean that they would make their entry into adulthood in a one-down social position. Susan is practicing her culture in a way that is counter to the dominant norms of marriage in Talltown, specifically in being unmarried following the completion of a college education and obtaining full time professional employment.
Julie is also unmarried and she too is embodying norms counter to those of Talltown, though she does so in order to lay claim to a more middle-class status position. Julie is a high school graduate and new mother, who lives with her baby's father. She talks about delaying marriage, though she is happy in her relationship, because she has plans to enroll in some post-secondary coursework in the medical field, and knows she will have more support in the form of financial aid options by being an unmarried mother. Julie might more effectively perform Talltown norms of family by being married to the father of her infant, but she is betting on the educational path to raise her status in Talltown, not relying on the familial path.

Tom is also taking his time on the way to marriage and family. He had thought he was headed that way with his then-girlfriend, with whom he had been in a relationship for several years. Then that relationship went badly wrong and Tom found he was in no hurry to marry. He says, "Up until this last summer I was fairly sure that I was going to marry her and then I found out she was bat-shit crazy... I'll know when I know. I'll know when it happens."

A counter norm, involving what some might interpret as a rush into marriage, is also prominent in Talltown emerging adult discourse. Of the five divorced emerging adults I interviewed, only one has a college degree. Thanks to encouragement of one very important teacher, Sasha applied and was accepted into a four-year degree program, which she completed before returning to work for Talltown County. All the other divorcees do not have college degrees, though Wendy, a bartend, had military experience, and Sabrina, a Hispanic food service employee, has
taken some online college courses. The emergent pattern in my sample seems to be that youth who are not college-bound tend to marry earlier than their college-bound peers. This supports the finding of Settersten and Ray (2010), who note that *swimmers* can be expected to marry later in life than *treaders*. This is not to say that some of those emerging adults who entered into marriage at slightly older ages, and who are currently married, will not be divorced in the future, but it is significant that it is Talltown's *treaders* who seem to have married and divorced while yet in emerging adulthood. This might be a reflection of the relatively more uncertain lives these emerging adults lead, which put their marriages under undue strain. I think it more likely that these early marriages and divorces are reflections of the strategic identity exploration characteristic of emerging adulthood, and *treaders'* relatively more limited opportunities to undertake this exploration.

As a high school dropout, Beth had limited avenues through which to pursue the identity exploration so characteristic of emerging adulthood, particularly in the field of education. She can, however, undertake identity exploration in the field of dating. After dating a particular individual for several years, Beth endeavored to express her adult status through this relationship and got married. She and her husband were together for several more years before divorcing, an event Beth describes as "mutual" because "the feeling just wasn't there." Although Beth married at an early age, it seems she was still undertaking romantic identity exploration and, after a time, found that the marriage was not what she wanted. Beth still calls her ex her "best friend." Bartender Wendy, and Sabrina, a Hispanic food service employee,
had similar experiences, though they were each married for a much shorter period of time than Beth. They too found that the marriages they had entered into were not what they desired. Both in entering into and exiting out of these relatively young marriages, Beth, Sabrina, and Wendy embody the normative identity construction of their phase of life, but in doing so they embody norms that are counter to the middle-class norms of education before marriage and family.

Now we can see that there are at least two instances of discord between discourse and practice. In terms of educational norms, the myth of meritocracy is widely followed by youth of middle-class backgrounds. Despite the fact that it is contradictory to what the community needs, it is the privileged pathway. In terms of family norms, the pathway that middle-class youth take, delaying marriage and family until after post-secondary education is complete, is again the privileged pathway. It is also the pattern among youth of today generation-wide. Those who stay meanwhile, try through they may to embody the norms of family, still fall short in doing so independent of post-secondary education or training. Their families, are not the ideal family.

Another discursive norm of Talltown emerging adults and marriage stands in stark opposition to the norm of taking one's time, and that is readiness. Readiness involves being open to marriage when the opportunity presents itself, though it has not yet done so. Lifelong residents Jonathan and Lori, a medical professional and entrepreneur, respectively, and a college graduates embody this norm, as does Jesse a former Talltown turned big city resident. Being gay, marriage may never be a legal
option for Jesse, at least not in all 50 states. Still, marriage is important to him. He says, "Oh yeah...I would like to have a partner one day and get married if it's ever legal for me to."

Perhaps partly in response to Talltown norms of marriage and family, because of their desire to perform readiness, emerging adult discourse also includes talk about current romantic attachments as possibly being "the one." College student Collin, mechanic Dane, and teacher Derek, all talk about their current girlfriends as perhaps someday being their wives. There are also those who have taken this idea a bit further in that they have become engaged, like government employee Jeremy and retail employee Ted. Homemaker Megan was so ready to embody Talltown norms marriage and family that she graduated high school early to marry her then-boyfriend, her senior of several years. Those who have been divorced can also embody readiness to try again in the marriage field. Sasha, who was not born in Talltown, but moved there as an infant, has a college degree and now works for the county, and Stephanie, a lifelong resident except for the time she briefly attended college and then beauty school, who is also a mother, have both been married and divorced. But both are also embodying readiness for Talltown's norms of marriage and family. Both of them embodied this norm through their relationships with their boyfriends, with Sasha recently becoming engaged.

Talltown community discourse is particularly replete with talk about the marital status of those who are professionals in the community, especially those whose work is seen as serving an important function in the community. These newcomer
professionals can be roughly categorized as those who plan to stay and those who plan to go where other opportunities take them. Those who plan to stay, including relative newcomers and teachers Kelly and Rachel, police officers Chad and Steve, and Tia, who is Hispanic and has some college education. All of these individuals are married and have children, and all of them talk about Talltown as a good place for their children to grow up. In so doing embody many of Talltown's most important norms, and enact a reinforcement of their belonging in the community.

Finding Oneself in Parenthood

Talltown community discourse reveals the norm of having children after finding "the one" and getting married, but the precise timing of when plans to, and does, have children, is subject to much variation. Broadly, Talltown youth that have plans to/are going/have gone off to college, plan to, and likely will, postpone both marriage and parenthood for a longer than Talltown youth who stay after high school. As Allison, a lifelong resident and now college student, said, "If you don't get out of Talltown you kind of find someone, settle down and marry."

Regardless of when one might embark into parenthood, the Talltown discursive norm is that as adults, people have children, but as adolescents and emerging adults this should be postponed. Nearly every adolescent I asked, said they would like to have children "someday." In their emphases on how distant this day might be, they reveal a normative emphasis placed on identity exploration and skill acquisition, prior to becoming a parent. This is considered the wisest and most
strategic approach to parenthood that youth can take. And so they talk about wanting to do "other things" before becoming parents, such as college, travel, finding out what they like and who they are. Emerging adults give similar reasons for postponing parenthood, with slightly less emphasis on what they want to do and slightly more emphasis on what they are doing at present. Former Talltown youth who today live in bigger cities, might say they are enjoying being with "DINK" with their partner, "dual income, no kids," while emerging adults in Talltown might talk about postponing parenthood while they fix up a house in which to raise a family. In this regard, the discursive strategies of these youth are similar. They each emphasize doing the expected preparatory work, especially regarding identity and skill, necessary for a successful launch into an adulthood that includes parenthood.

Men's and women's discourses of parenthood are notably different. Emerging adult men's discourse, in particular, tends to emphasize the performance of the norm of parenthood "someday," which is nowhere near today, but in the distant future. Talltown men and women alike encounter a norm of postponed parenthood, still preferably following marriage, when one has all or most of their college education complete. But for men, there is also the discursive norm of being a good provider before becoming a father. They talk about the things they feel obligated, in terms of preparation for that future responsibility, to do before bringing children in the world, particularly securing a "good job." As Hispanic teenager Eduardo says, "Before all that I'd like to have like a stable job. Something that I know I could raise my family with." I take Eduardo's statement here to be a completely honest hope for his future,
but it may also be a strategic side stepping of stereotypes about male ethnic minorities such as himself.

Emerging adult women's discourse emphasizes similar strategic justifications for delaying parenthood, but it may also frame parenthood as the fulfillment of a lifetime goal. Megan always knew she wanted to be a wife and mother and she is particularly adept in the performance of the norm of parenthood. Since graduating high school early to marry her then-boyfriend, who later received a college degree, Megan has been a homemaker. She says, "I'm pretty much a homemaker and I help my husband on the ranch and I take care of the kids. I help out here [the restaurant and bar her mother-in-law owns] when they need help. But it's not an actual job." In downplaying the work Megan does outside the home, which in my observation seemed a bit frequent to constitute, "not an actual job," Megan nevertheless prioritizes and performs Talltown's norms of marriage and family above all others.

The supremacy of Talltown's marriage and family norms are not at odds with the similarly dominant educational norm of a four-year university degree. Owing to the assumption that one will have a better job with a college degree, going to college can be viewed as doing the hard work necessary to prepare oneself to successfully raise a family. Through particular careers, women especially, further strategize for position relating to the embodiment of Talltown's marriage and family norms. Hannah, who is a lifelong resident of Talltown who is now in college, talks not only about looking forward to the days when she has children, but also about a specifically chosen a career path that will support the more important goal of parenthood. Hannah
would like to be a teacher, because she enjoys working with children, but also because it means that someday her schedule will match that of her children, thus allowing her to maximize her time with them. She says,

I wanna teach, but I more wanna be a stay-at-home mom. Um, I picked teaching because I love kids and I wanna work with kids, but also because once I have kids I'll have the same schedule as them. Um, and you know, I could be a stay-at-home mom and substitute sometimes.

Other women, like divorced beautician, Stephanie, also choose careers based on the scheduling flexibility they provide so that one can also raise a family.

Despite the dominant norms of family, there are some Talltown youth who do not perform an orientation toward future parenthood and in so doing embody norms of family counter to those dominant in Talltown. Susan, for example, a college educated former resident of Talltown who is unmarried, but in a committed relationships, does not wish to have children. When asked if she did, she said, "Nope, nope, nope. I've got animals."

Ann, a graduate degree-holding, relative newcomer to Talltown, who works in a professional capacity, occasionally with youth, similarly does not wish to have children. She said, "No. I like children, but only when they belong to other people."

Ann, unlike Susan, still finds a way to embody the norm of Talltown being family-friendly. Thus she also said, "But if I were forced to have a child against my will, I would probably seriously consider staying in Talltown or someplace like this."

Those who already have children and are raising them in Talltown, quite obviously embody the family-friendly norm. And yet the timing of parenthood matters. In the case of teen pregnancy, which I was assured by community leaders is
very rare in Talltown, the young parents will still be judged based on their ability to embody the dominant post-secondary educational norm, and being a young parent will certainly make that more difficult. Perhaps in response to the power of this norm, it seems that the vast majority of emerging adult parents in Talltown are presently married, like homemaker Megan, and Jenny and Kelly, who are both college graduates who work with youth. There are also those, like beautician Stephanie, who had been married, became a parent, and then divorced. Still, in the embodiment of the married couple-led nuclear household, these parents reinforce Talltown marriage and family norms, particularly that which governs the order in which such events should occur.

Of course, not everyone follows the same timeline in the transition to adulthood. Some people do become parents before emerging adulthood is over, even before adolescence is over. Ted, who is a high school graduate working in retail, recently became engaged to the woman, whom he has dated since high school, who is pregnant with his child. In proposing to his expectant girlfriend, Ted too embodies the Talltown norm of marriage and family, if he has done so with a slight variation in the timing. Beth too, a divorced high school dropout, has tried to embody the Talltown norms of family, but with only limited and temporary success. She wants to have children, but does not yet have any. She says, "I would love to have kids. I actually assumed by now I would, but I kind of don't think I can." Not one to be deterred, Beth has pursued other ways of finding herself in parenthood, notably by forming relationships with men who are already fathers. She says,
My ex-husband has 2 kids that were prior to me, 'cause he was married before...and then um actually [the man who] I'm with now, he has a 5 year old. She doesn't live here, but she may eventually. If it goes that way.

In these examples we see that parenthood remains both an important marker of the transition to adulthood and an important Talltown norm. Parenthood is a pathway that might especially appeal to emerging adults who stay after high school, particularly since they have less opportunity to find meaning through courses of study and career, compared to their peers who go to college.

Finding Oneself Through Education

"The global economy and global cultures are increasingly shaping rural childhoods and youth," particularly through the increasing association of education with worldliness and upward social mobility, thus more youth are participating in schooling for longer periods of time (Panelli et al. 2007:5). Since there is already a strong tradition of primary and secondary education in the U.S., youth here are tending toward greater enrollment in college. Talltown community discourse enacts this trend as a symbolic field in which youth are assessed and negotiate position.

Having acquired cultural knowledge that says college is not only valuable, but perhaps even necessary, Talltown adolescent and emerging adults discourse reveals the dominance of the intention to obtain post-secondary education. The most valued educational path through emerging adulthood among Talltown youth is through college, particularly university. Some will go off to college having already formulated some rather clear ideas about what they will study and what career they are ultimately
working toward, often one of several areas of study that are quite popular among Talltown youth, including Agriculture and Animal Sciences, Forestry, and Rangeland Management. Veterinary Medicine, Engineering, and Nursing or other medical professions.

Others of Talltown's adolescents, and even some of its emerging adults, are less sure about what they ought to study in college and what they would do for a living after that. Layla, a popular good student who has lived in Talltown since early childhood, has difficulty making up her mind, as to whether she wants to become a psychologist or be a model. Meanwhile Brandi, another popular good student, who is a lifelong resident of Talltown and is now in her mid-teens, is having trouble deciding both what to study and where to study. She says,

I was sure of that 'til like last week. [Laughs] But, I'm prob'ly gonna go to OSU or Boise State. Um, I was looking into X-Ray technician, but I'd have to go to OIT, which I do not like at all. I don't like Klamath at all. The town is just no. And it's too close to home. Um, or Pharmacy. But, I don't know if I wanna graduate when I'm 28 years old. [Laughs] So, I don't know. So far I'm just waiting to see...I was thinking about going to Bend Community for 2 years and getting my teaching bachelor's and then moving up to OSU to continue that, get my master's. But I'm not, I like the big campuses and the, like the private college that makes you feel like you're in college rather than the middle of the city.

Brandi is like most of the Talltown adolescents I talked with. She is very focused on the identity exploration part in that she has a good idea of what interests her and what kinds of places she might like to live, but she is no way ready to commit to one of them.

Despite the uncertainty about what to study and where, most Talltown youth who can afford to attend college end up choosing one option or another, usually right
out of high school. College student Allison, mechanic Dane, beautician Stephanie, and bartender Wendy, all suggest that going to college is what "most" Talltown youth do. As Dane says, "Anymore you really have to have some sort of college education to find a good job." Paul, a middle-aged man who works with local youth, seconds this opinion when he says that youths' best bet is to "get the hell outta here." Scholars who study the transition to adulthood today tend to agree. As Settersten and Ray write, "To get ahead today, education is no longer a luxury but a necessity" (2010:31). Jonathan, who has a graduate degree and works in a professional capacity in his family's well-established business, supports this idea. Speaking of the difference between people he grew up with that went to college and those that did not, he says, "The ones who went off to college tend to have higher paying jobs than the ones who went directly into workforce."

So it is that many Talltown youth have aspirations to go off to college, even if they have absolutely no idea what it is they ought to be majoring in. They simply trust that as they work their way through, they will find out more about themselves and the field of study and career that will suit them. In the event that one is unable to come to a decision as to where to go and what to study, there is always the option of undertaking some basic coursework online to be transferred later toward a particular degree program. Dane, for one, is starting out with distance education. When there have a particular reason for going to a particular university, which may be getting as far away from Talltown as possible, Talltown youth often talk about wanting to go ether to someplace that is not too close to Talltown or someplace that is reasonably
close to Talltown. Collin, a lifelong resident and member of a well-respected family, for one, did not want to be too far. The other, and largest, college deciding factors are one's desired program of study and cost.

Talltown community discourse clearly favors the four-year university degree as the best post-secondary education option. Reflecting on the time in his life when he was about to Charlie, who is now in his second year of college, says, "I was pretty set on a four-year degree." This was the goal for nearly every adolescent I talked to, even among those for whom this was likely to be an academic or financial challenge, which soon to be high school graduate, Holly points out. She says, "The expense is a challenge." In the end college will not be achievable for everyone. Talltown's nearly singular cultural focus on college is so powerful that it obscures the fact that it is an ideology, which should make it obvious that it is not achievable for, let alone right for, everyone. In fact, the ideology does a disservice to those who might be more inclined to attend, and ultimately be more successful in, a vocational and technical institute.

The emphasis on college has been so internalized as to occur across classes. And yet not everyone chooses to, nor can, undertake this path. Matt, a mechanic in his early twenties, wanted to go to college, "but it didn't happen." Reflecting on her own chances of getting to college Kendra, a lifelong resident in her mid-teens, says,

I think it just kinda depends on if I keep good grades like all through high school and stuff. Like, I'm gonna try to but..I might just like, if something that like that does happen I might just go to a community college somewhere or something.

Here Kendra explicitly states that the reason she might go to a community college rather than a university is because she may not be academically prepared for a
university by the time she leaves high school. Amanda, a resident of Talltown since early childhood who is in her late teens, talks about her boyfriend's college experience and in so doing identified yet another reason to attend community college. In her boyfriend's case, he had been attending a university, "and then that didn't work. So now he's just going the community college route, for this year at least." Amanda does not elaborate as to whether her boyfriend found the workload too difficult to keep up with, the partying to difficult to resist, or some combination of reasons, and though she sees the value of community college in this case, her talk on this matter still reinforces the dominance of a university education.

But even people who are academically ready for a university education might not be financially ready. It may be that people who hold to an alternative ideology, in which college is not necessary, maintain this view as a way to deal with the financial constraints they are under, and which make the college pathway unavailable to them. Some might be afraid to take on loans. If they are not only unsure of the cost, but of their ability to succeed, they may in fact be making a very wise decision to begin their post-secondary education with one of the more affordable options. After all, "Those who drop out of college with student debt are not reaping the full payoff from a college degree, and yet they still have a college tuition bill to pay" (Settersten and Ray 2010:34). Amanda specifically addresses the financial challenge that college represents. She says,

I considered community college just because my mom wants me to. She wants me to save money for the first couple years and then go elsewhere, but the way I see it, if I get all my scholarships it's gonna equal out to the same thing anyways. So if I end up not getting very many scholarships I probably will go to a
community college just to save a little bit of money, well a lot of money.

Here Amanda discusses how community college can be of value for those without the financial means to pursue a university education, at least not right out of high school. For Amanda, how successful she is regarding scholarships (she clearly recognizes the uncertainty involved) will determine what kind of school she starts out at. In this way class is seen to be a significant determinant of the type of post-secondary institution, if any, a person attends.

Despite the discursive emphasis on post-secondary education, there is a counter discourse in which it is not emphasized. As Heather, a relative newcomer and teacher who married into one of the most well-know Talltown area families, notes,

There aren't a ton of parents that want to take advantage of the [the scholarships], and I wish that more parents pushed that on their kids. Get good grades, get out of here. If you want to, come back. But there's so many of them that have been, um, they have been here for years and years and years and they've been ranchers for years and years and years. And it's like, "Why do you need to leave? You're just gonna be a rancher." And it's like, "Well, go out and get a business degree and come back and you can have this ranch and be a whole lot more successful." And they don't see that.

Here Heather reveals that despite Talltown's discursive emphasis on meritocracy as the means to obtaining that key to social and economic success, the college degree, family background is yet a big factor in determining what path to adulthood a young person takes. She reveals that no all parents are on board with the middle-class goals of the educational institution. There are some in the community, parents and their children, who have not internalized the idea of meritocracy or the need for a college education. This is not a very powerful counter-discourse, but it is present.
When a Talltown adolescent does not "go away to college" right after high school, they may still successfully embody the norm of post-secondary education, so long as the path they embark upon can eventually lead them to college. This is the case for youth, particularly men, who enlist in the military, not to embark upon a military career, but to learn skills and earn the opportunity to receive funding for college when one's service has ended. This is not only a path for men however. Holly, who has resided in Talltown since middle-childhood and is now in her late teens, is in the process of enlisting and Wendy, a bartender in her mid-twenties had already completed military service.

Some Talltown youth enlist directly after high school. Others, as Holly notes, hang around for a while first but may then enlist later. The number of local youth taking either of these routes varies from year to year and from time to time, as Allison, a lifelong resident and current college student, pointed out, several members of a friend group will enlist in the same branch "together."

There are two reasons given why youth, personal patriotic calling aside, choose to enlist. Either they cannot afford college or they are not yet ready for it, both of which may be reflections of a lower- or working-class experience. Dennis, a resident of Talltown since early childhood, for one, is on this path. Although, "Originally, I wanted to make a career out of [the military]" he has since changed his mind and is taking advantage of the funds available to him because of his service in order to prepare for a new career. Other youth take a path that is the reverse of Dennis's. With some college experience already under her belt, lifelong resident and current college
student Allison has come to see military service as a potential good next step for herself. She is particularly interested in ways that military service can further the career she's already been preparing for, which is why she is "looking at becoming a [military] nurse." In these ways a transition to adulthood that involves military service may yet reflect and reinforce dominant post-secondary educational norms.

Some youth flat out do not like school and are completely uninterested in pursuing a college degree. Talltown community discourse makes sense of such youth in describing them, not in a way that challenges the norm of college education, but as those for whom, "school's just not for them." Talk about these youth also supports the myth of meritocracy, with mention of vocational or technical training as a way for these youth to yet work hard and get a "good job" someday. In this small way, the myth of meritocracy, particularly its emphasis on ability, is actually partially accommodating of hierarchy and difference. Kristi, who was a lifelong resident of Talltown prior to beginning college, says of those she had grown up with in Talltown, "I think someone went to Lineman School. I know a girl who's in Culinary School." Carter, meanwhile, a lifelong resident, who is now in his early twenties and who did not like school and has never intended to go to college, expresses interest in Taxidermy School. Still, discourse suggests that this is not a particularly popular path for Talltown youth.

Kelly, a relative newcomer and teacher, says,

I haven't seen a lot of kids go to vocational school, but um, Lineman School seems to be a popular thing. There's a group of boys that um, you know, for like, to work for Pacific Power, um, I've known 5 or 6 boys who go do that. And I know we've had a few that go to be mechanics and that type of stuff. And those
seem to be kids that have parents that really want them to go do something after school, but they know that their kid didn't like the traditional school setting. They were kids that, that were antsy here, they didn't wanna be here and they kinda just got by and just get outta high school, "I gotta get outta here." And then um, they want to do, they wanna do, they want a profession, but they don't wanna spend a lot of time in college I think.

So in lieu of the very popular college education path, which can include a military detour, some youth (those whom Kelly suggests have parents who push for some kind of post-secondary education or training) can undertake a technical or vocational program and still embody the dominant norm of post-secondary education and training.

Importantly, Talltown community discourse about vocational or technical training, does not suggest that this is a path for youth who might go to college, if they could otherwise afford to do so, or if they had otherwise received more encouragement in their primary and secondary school years. By contrast there is not much emphasis placed on vocational school as a place for those who simply could not afford college. This is a path one pursues when one knows that one's desired (perhaps required) work will need to be more hands-on than academic. As Rachel says

Last year we had a student who wanted to go back to oh, it's in Wyoming, a diesel tech. school. Because school was, you know, school, um reading out of the book and writing a paper was not his thing. He was much more hands-on and so I think, for him to go to that kind of school would just fit him perfectly. So, I like to look at the individual kids and see, you know, what would, what I think would fit them best. And then when they pick something that's along those lines, um, I feel like they are kind of self-aware of what they need to do.

The vocational and technical path is, in this way, talked about as an acceptable path for those who have not the ability to succeed in college. Kaelyn, who lived in Talltown from middle childhood up until the time she went to college, says,
I think there were a couple of people who wanted to go to lineman school. I know one guy that graduated with me that wanted to go to welding school. I don't actually know if that actually happened. But I know that in my graduating class and the people that I grew up with, the vocational school is a really well promoted alternative to college because a lot of people who graduated with me probably couldn't get into a four-year institution right off the bat. The other thing too is if you think about it like the SATs and stuff, they are pretty much like, can you read? Can you write? Can you do math? But a lot of people who graduated with me, they couldn't read. My sophomore year I begged to get put into junior English because we were sharing curriculum with eight graders and my brother could have cheated off my test and we were sharing curriculum with freshman and we were learning the difference between knight with k and night with an n. And so as sophomores in high school and I was like "ehh not cool". But I mean there were people who struggled with stuff like that, basic fundamental schools that high school students usually should know, but they grew up in ranches and they grew up farms, and they grew up fixing fence, and welding and stuff. So college wouldn't even be a good path for them anyways, and so vocational school was really pushed, especially to the people that were on the GED path, or didn't have good GPAs, or came from farms and ranches and stuff.

Kaelyn here reveals the Talltown discursive norm of vocational school as an option for those who are unlikely to be academically successful in other post-secondary education settings. These are people framed as having different, and limiting, innate capabilities. And so meritocracy and its emphasis on hard work remain unchallenged, despite the fact that those who end up pursuing vocational or technical training often would not have been financially or otherwise able to earn a university degree.

_Finding Oneself at Work_

It should perhaps come as no surprise that in a community such as Talltown, with historic and cultural emphasis on agriculture and natural resource extraction, there is much talk about work. One might think that work is of greater importance the closer youth get to adulthood, and in some ways this is correct, for it is only after a
certain point in adolescence that youth can legally be employed. Work certainly becomes increasingly vital as emerging adults become more financially independent, but in isolated small towns like Talltown, work is, just as importantly, a marker of community identity. As such, community members of many ages can embody the norm of hard work and in so doing perform a position of belonging in their rural community.

Childhood and Adolescence

We have already established that there is an expectation in Talltown for youth to be involved in their community, both in social life and in the work that they do. Youth are also generally expected to help out around the house, with yard work, or babysitting, as are youth in the U.S. broadly. Talltown youth that grow up on ranches also contribute in ways that are age, and also gender, encouraged. Even Talltown youth who grow up in town may have friends who grow up on ranches. They may even get to help out on those ranches from time to time.

In addition to ranching, entrepreneurship is a preferred occupation through which one might perform and reinforce the norm of hard work. Lori, a lifelong resident in her late twenties from a well-established ranching family, who now runs her own small business, says that people expect her to be a hard worker because her parents were. She says, "When people talk about my parents they're always like, 'Oh, they're workaholics.'" Lori also describes herself as a hard worker and related this to growing up in Talltown. She says,
I think, like, the work ethic of kids here seems to be stronger than like, big cities. And I don't know if that's 'cause there's not anything else to do, so people expect you to work 'cause you have more free time. I don't really know why it is, but it seems that way.

Lori suggests that this youth work ethic is born out of a limited number of things for youth to do outside of school.

In the discourse about the youth socialization into the Talltown work ethic, there is a supporting notion that youth who grow up on ranches often reach adulthood faster. They have more opportunities to learn about hard work, and about risk and responsibilities. This, lifelong resident and college student Collin says, prepares ranch-raised youth "for challenges ahead." Ann, a relative newcomer and professional in her early thirties, also describes this particularly Talltown youth work ethic. She says,

I mean I know some kids...that may be 12 but are pretty close to adulthood 'cause they're very willing to take responsibility for themselves and their actions and the outcomes of those things. Um, even though they couldn't support themselves because it's not even legal to get a job, so and I think in some ways you know, I've interacted with kids in a lot of different places in a lot of different programs and I think that in some ways Talltown kids might be more ready to take that step than other places. Um, particularly kids that come from ranches because they seem to learn very early that there are consequences to their actions, some of which are, are very painful or even fatal. So they have a level of um, accountability I think that you don't find everywhere.

To hear Ann, Collin, and Derek talk about it, growing up grounded in the Talltown work ethic should be good preparation for the adult world of accountability and consequences.
Emerging Adulthood

To find oneself in work as an emerging adult is really dependent on whether one is a swimmer or a *treader*, a *stayer* or a *leaver*. Members of each group may do a fair amount of job changing, but the way they do so differs. Those who experience the privilege of an extended transition to adulthood can try out different types of work in the course of identity exploration. Those of less privilege too, those who must make a more rapid transition to adulthood, can undertake identity exploration through work, even as their employment statuses are insecure and their jobs change for reasons of necessity.

The idea behind the exploration of identity at work is that one is ever whittling down to what it is they are good at and enjoy, and ultimately, what kind of career will suit them best for the life they want to live. This is nevertheless a strategic endeavor. In whatever field of employment one chooses, the goal is to get a "good job." The meaning of a good job, I learned, differs depending on the route one takes into adulthood. The longer and slower-paced route is the more middle-class and institutionally supported route. Good jobs on this route are especially defined as those requiring (some might even go far as to say resulting from) a college education. Matt, a relative newcomer and teacher, says,

I'm always telling the kids, "if you want a good job" or "you want to make money and not have your back broken at the end of 40 years, go get yourself and education." I mean that's the only way to do it. There's, there's no way around it. The better your education is, usually the more, or the less physically demanding your job tends to be. That's just the way it is. So if you don't want to be working in dirt or don't want to be building stuff or don't want to be doing this, you're gonna have to get an education to avoid that. That's the only way around it.
As lifelong resident and college student Charlie says,

There's like the jobs you can get at like a grocery or there's a few restaurants you can work at. But, other than that there's really nothing like, there's some, they offer some high schooler jobs, or kids that graduate high school and don't really move on, but for like, incoming grown-ups or people that wanna like move in and start a family there's not really jobs for them.

Dane too, seems to support this idea when he says, "Anymore you really have to have some sort of college education to find a good job." In these various ways "good jobs" of the degree-requiring variety occupy a prominent space in Talltown community discourse. These jobs are made all the more valuable because there are not very many employment opportunities for professionals in Talltown. What degree-requiring "good jobs" there are in Talltown, are mostly available through the hospital, the schools, and government.

Marking the Transition to Adulthood

In the not too distant American past the transition to adulthood occurred quickly after high school graduation, with full time work and family as its markers. Today this transition is more multifaceted, relating to more areas of life than just work and family. This complexity, visible especially in youth migration patterns, is also made visible in the way youth think about the transition to adulthood.

Talltown community discourse about the transition to adulthood is far from explicit. Often when I asked people what they thought marked the transition to adulthood, they had to think about it for a moment before answering. People often
professed not to know, even though they generally proceeded to offer an answer. Lori, an entrepreneur with some college, who is in her early twenties, says,

I'm still trying to figure that out. [Laughs] I don't know. I mean I definitely thought that I've taken a lot of steps but people I guess always, that I've known forever, still will always be like, "Oh, sweetheart." Or you know, little kid kind of conversation. I'm like, "Oh, ok." So I don't really know how you get treated like an adult.

As a lifelong resident, except for time at college, who even then came home most weekends, and member of a well-established family, it is perhaps more difficult for Lori to find and assert an adult identity separate from her identity as one of the community's youth. Jose, a Hispanic cowboy in his late teens, similarly is unsure what marks the transition to adulthood. He said, "Uh shoot. That's a good question. I think it's when somebody's mature enough to take care of themselves and try to take care of others." Here Jose seems to support the traditional markers of adulthood, including marriage and parenthood, something Allison, a lifelong resident who is in her second year of college, explicitly identifies as markers of adulthood for those who do not leave Talltown after high school. She says "As far as I've witnessed, if you don't get out of Talltown you kind of find someone, settle down and marry. That's sort of how I've observed. Either you marry and settle down or you move away." As a homemaker, Megan's life is all about family, so her response focused on this. She says,

I've felt like an adult since I was 12 so, [Laughs]. Um, for me it was getting married. Getting married and having children. Um, maybe for someone who didn't get married I think graduating from high school, maybe moving on to college. Um, or having some sort of goal after school. But it, I kinda think that um, graduating from high school, turning 18 it just, your right to vote, I think that marks it. For me it was getting married.
Even though she mentions marriage and children, what marks the transition to adulthood for Megan is "having some sort of goal after school," which for her was marriage and children. Megan's experience stands in contrast to that of many of her peers. Stephanie, a divorced beautician, also describes the transition to adulthood in terms of her personal experience. She says,

I had my oldest child when I was 21...and a lot of kids who I graduated with haven't even had kids, are just free spirits you know? And no responsibilities really. Some of 'em are still in college, you know, and it's like, "Have you grown up at all?" [Laughs] You know, so I mean, it just depends.

Stephanie, like Megan, describes her experience as different from that of other Talltown youth. Their experiences of taking on responsibility for others stand in contrast to those of Talltown youth of relative privilege, who make a slower transition to adulthood by rather slowly taking on responsibility for themselves. In this light, youth who make the quicker transition can be seen to embody the norm of family, often quite successfully, while not embodying the norm of post-secondary education.

Thinking ahead, Kendra, a lifelong Talltown resident who is in her mid-teens, says she would have reached adulthood, "When I am living on my own. And paying my own bills and stuff like that. When I start supporting myself and have a job, I think that's what would make it [adulthood]." Paula, speaking from the perspective of a middle-aged woman who works with youth, says something similar. "I guess by the responsibility, takin' on responsibilities and um, maintaining a job maybe." In this discursive thread, adulthood is marked by the maintenance of a job good enough to permit one to provide for oneself.
Talltown community discourse also features a transition to adulthood that entails some vague combination of maturity, responsibility, and independence. Brandi, a lifelong resident now in her mid-teens, says, "I haven't actually hit [adulthood] yet, so I have no idea. [Laughs] Um, responsibility I guess. Being able to live on your own and be responsible with it." In her mention of living on one's own, Brandi harkens back to the more economic markers of adulthood, but she still emphasizes the responsibility. Wendy, a bartender in her mid-twenties, is not much clearer on what characterizes this maturity, though the independence she described also includes college as a way to develop the skills to make it on one's own. She says,

You're not dependent on your parents. You're not, you're, you're dependent on yourself. You don't need to fall back onto that. You, you, you have your education you have your, you have your skills to go on and more forth. You know? There's still people I know my age that are still dependent on their parents...I think your adulthood in Talltown happens when you, you start college and you, you get your education and you move out of your, you move out of your adolescence phase. You really do because you mature and you grow up and you know, I'm 25 and if I half knew the things I did now when I was 16, god I'd have it all figured out at 16! But at 16 I was at, at 18 even, at 20!

Jonathan, a graduate-degree holding medical professional in his late-twenties, who has returned to Talltown, says something similar in describing the transition to adulthood as "moving toward a more independent lifestyle." Ann, who is in her early thirties and is a relative newcomer, describes this maturity in somewhat more concrete terms, and in doing so supports the idea that youth from Talltown are better prepared for adulthood than youth in some other places. She says,

I've interacted with kids in a lot of different places in a lot of different programs and I think that in some ways Talltown kids might be more ready to take that step than other places. Um, particularly kids that come from
ranches because they seem to learn very early that there are consequences to their actions, some of which are, are very painful or even fatal. So they have a level of um, accountability I think that you don't find everywhere.

Adolescents Holly and Eduardo also talk about a vague sense of maturity, but described the transition to adulthood in how it varies from person to person. Holly describes this variation not in terms of what is involved in the transition to adulthood, but when it happens, something Mark, a teacher, and Stephanie, a mother, seem to agree with. Stephanie says,

I think you have to definitely have a level of maturity. Um, and I don't think it's totally on your maturity level. I think you have to have a lot of respect for everybody older than you, younger than you um, in between, you know, just everywhere. It definitely has to be um in how you apply yourself to certain things. Uh, and I've just, I mean, not just like silly situations, but serious situations. Situations where things are going wrong, things are going right, how in every single possible thing, I mean, how you react to something. Um, I think that's pretty much what classifies an adult. I think you can be 30 and still not be an adult because you, you, you don't think logically. [Laughs] I mean, you don't apply yourself at all. I mean, I know people who are 27 and still haven't even figured out what they're gonna do in their life and I'm like, "I've known what I'm gonna do since I was like 16." [Laughs]

Holly shows that it is important to her that I see her as an adult when she says, "Guys are really immature. Um, but I think that's like that everywhere. Um, they don't mature here until they're like 25 and then they're like, at my mentality level, maybe then." Here Holly demonstrates what Maggie, a relative newcomer in her mid-teens, notes about people needing have a desire to undertake the transition to adulthood. She says, "You have to, yourself, want to be mature and want to grow up and not always wanna be a baby and always, always just stay home with mom, "She'll do everything for me." Collin, a lifelong resident and current college student, also sees the transition to adulthood as happening at different times for different people. He says,
I think it would be different for each person, but prob'ly be a measure of how much responsibility they could undertake: paying bills, keeping up with classes and that kinda stuff. So some people would transition quickly and others would take a long time.

Stephanie, a divorced mother and beautician, also mentions differences in how youth make the transition to adulthood and gives the example of another emerging adult she knows. She says,

Well it just depends. Like, one of the girls I know, she's 29, just figured out what she wants to do. I mean, partyin' all the time. I'm sure she pays her own bills and that sort of thing, but it's just the day-to-day, going to work, you know, I don't, I don't know. It's just totally different. It just seems like I've grown up a lot faster than some of the other kids have.

Eduardo, a Hispanic circular migrant in his mid-teens, also talks about how the transition of adulthood varies, but Eduardo also emphasizes the importance of place. He says,

Well, an adult would be considered somebody that has um, a mature like, higher level of maturity and more experienced. And overall has a, a better experience than younger kids and basically somebody that's well known for being you know, really mature and respectful...be who you are basically...I'm thinking that's Talltown specific. 'Cause in [he nearest urban center] it'd be something different 'cause in [the nearest urban center] they could be like, "Oh, you're mature when you start drinking." Or, "You're mature when you, when you move outta your house." You're mature when all those things and you're an adult when all that happens, but it's not true.

Eduardo upholds the Talltown community's discursive norm that it produces good kids. For Eduardo, particularly in Talltown, the transition to adulthood is a matter of becoming "experienced" and "respectful." Maggie voices a similar view when she describes people who had "matured more" as knowing "what's right and wrong."

Mark, a relative newcomer and teacher, picks up on this somewhat different but
related perspective on the transition to adulthood, which emphasizes not independence, but responsibility. He says,

For me it was when I started taking responsibility for my actions. Um, it's not necessarily an age, it's just when you, when you hit that point where you're responsible and you think about stuff before you go out and do it. I'm not saying that I don't go out and have a good time and be immature and all that stuff, but I know that there's gonna be consequences and that I'll have to pay for 'em. Like, if it comes to that.

For Mark then, adulthood is marked by the independence one has in exercising responsibility. Derek, a college educated member of a well-established family, talks about independence in adulthood through the theme of pursuing one's own path or direction. Hispanic mid-teens Eduardo, says something similar when he mentions learning to "be who you are."

Also prominent in Talltown community discourse is the theme that leaving home is what symbolically marks the transition to adulthood. This is a view that Charlie, a college student, Dane, a mechanic, and Paul, a middle-aged man who works with youth, share. Leaving home involves residing in a place separate from parents and taking on, often gradually in the case of college students, the task of paying their own bills. Thus Dane describes the transition to adulthood as "leaving your parents' house" and "takin' on responsibilities and bills." He also talked about how achieving this feat is more challenging today because of the current economic climate of recession. He says of moving back home after an unsuccessful launch, "Everyone else might see you as adult but you're still living at home so you still feel like a child, a kid." Because the presence of youth who return to Talltown out of necessity, not choice, can be explained with the myth of meritocracy, they are seen as having failed
to embody the norm of hard work, when in fact they may have really been failed by
the system.

*Finding Oneself in Trouble*

Alongside the successful transitions to adulthood described in Talltown
community discourse, are transitions that are less successful. In childhood and
adolescence, youth who struggle and are less invested in school, are "troubled," owing
to difficulties of poverty or other challenges at home. Once in emerging adulthood,
those who were once thought of as "troubled," become increasingly thought of as
"trouble." In other words, community discourse no longer frames them as youth who
are disadvantaged in some way. Rather, in emerging adulthood they framed as having
little to contribute, or at least making little contribution, to the community.

Communities like Talltown need some way to explain how and why some of
the youth entertain themselves through alcohol and drugs, potentially at the expense of
the social and economic productivity. Talltown community discourse reveals a broad
awareness of underage drinking in Talltown. And to be sure, some Talltown youth
engage in underage drinking. Beth says,

> We used to have to just come up with things to make our own fun and you
know, it's a lot of the times it ends up being drinking or you know, I mean I
never, I never got into any of the drugs or any of that, but and I know a lot of
the kids did. Um, we actually had some friends and when that happened they
were in a totally different group, you know.

There is also discursive recognition of drug use, though it is framed as less
widespread, though this too occurs. For example, while I was at the destruction derby,
the young men behind me began to talk about marijuana, apparently thinking they were being covert. I at least understood the conversation, as I believe did the large man sitting next to me, who was probably in his early thirties. He straightened up as if to hear them more clearly and smirked as they talked. One young man said something about 420, which prompted a shushing from another young man. Then another went on to say, "I need HTC" which he shortly clarified, "THC." After a moment's pause, as if waiting to see if anything would happen as a result of having such a conversation, yet another young man said, "Me too." Derek, a member of a ranching family who works with local youth, supports the idea that alcohol and drug use, at least marijuana use, is widespread enough to be problematic in Talltown. He says,

There's a lot of trouble...right now anyway...you know marijuana use, teenage drinking and that sort of thing. And I, and I don't know if, if a lot of the kids just don't have anything else to do... But that's one of the biggest problems, at least that I see here.

The popular discursive solution to this problem is to prevent it by keeping youth busy. Paula, lifelong resident who works with youth and is in her mid-fifties, suggests trouble is more about youths' attitudes. She says,

Mostly I hear, "It's boring here. There's nothing to do." That's what I hear kids tell me, but there is. 'Cause there is skiing...and there's fishing, there's hunting, there's camping, there's boating. I mean all that stuff's around if you wanna do it. So kids just kinda get in that mindset and I did too as a teenager. "There's nothing to do here." Those aren't the kinda things you wanna do as a teenager you know?

Dane, a mechanic in his early twenties, also echoes this idea. When describing what he and his friends did for fun growing up he says,

We did a lot of dumb stuff, spontaneous. Got into a lot of trouble... more with our parents than anything. Every now and then the cops got involved....Nothin'
serious...We'd just mess around, do dumb stuff. And then partied. Kinda got to entertain yourself here. You can't really do a lot.

Paul, a middle-aged man who works with local youth, like Paula, seems to view underage drinking in Talltown as something to be expected given the perfect storm of teenage ideas about fun and the idea that there is "nothing to do." Paul takes this point even further when he notes the impact of changes in the legal system. He says of the challenges facing Talltown area youth,

Just tryin' to keep their nose clean so they're not in trouble all the time. Because there isn't nothin' for 'em to do here. I mean, if you don't have nothin' for 'em to do, no place to go, no place to hang out, you know, what're they gonna do? They're gonna 'cause their own trouble. And kids'll be kids, you know. Granted, 30 years ago here if you got stopped by a cop they made you pour your beer out. Now...you're in trouble. When I first started...the police caught kids up at the canyon here. They had just bought 4 or 5 cases of beer and we made 'em open every bottle and dump it on the ground and sent 'em home. And nowadays if they got caught with 4 or 5 cases, phew, they're in trouble.

These stricter laws can be particularly problematic for emerging adults who stay after high school, but at not yet of legal drinking age. Emerging adults following the shorter more direct path are likely to see themselves as adults and so believe in their right to access adult privileges, like alcohol use (Eckert 1989). Being that word travels fast in a small town like Talltown, it is not surprising that when underage youth get caught embodying adulthood in this way (or committing a similar offense, such as using tobacco), people know about it. Although they may feel they are simply performing their adult status, others may only see them as embodying "trouble."

These youth are often from very low socioeconomic backgrounds, but they are also sometimes from more working-class backgrounds, as in the cases of sons of ranch
hands. These youth seem to see through the myth of meritocracy and the local hierarchy. And yet the normative judgment of this system is passed upon them, despite much discursive emphasis on community closeness. The pathways taken by these youth are explained away in terms of their innate capabilities, or having too little to do and making poor choices as a result.

In this chapter we have looked at how Talltown youth strategically respond to the dominant norms of the local and larger fields. We have seen how widely internalized middle-class norms of play, friendship, marriage, parenting, education, and work are. We have also seen how certain supposedly defining characteristics of emerging adulthood are differently available among youth. Forms of socially constructed difference, particularly class and gender, but also ethnicity and sexuality, have revealed that the myth of meritocracy is not all it promised to be, leading youth to strategize as best they can within this powerfully normative discourse.
Chapter Five: Case Studies

No two Talltown youth are quite alike and neither are any two Talltown youth experiences alike. Virtually all Talltown youth cultural practice can be seen as a negotiation of position, but how it is so is subject to tremendous variation. Practices can favor (or disfavor) one field or another, use a combination of techniques, and be undertaken simultaneously and in abstract and creative ways. The resultant conglomeration of practice is tremendously varied. But there are some patterns to be seen. Taking a macro-perspective we see that some youth rework their lives and end up riding high, while others, though they are resilient, only get by.

This chapter presents case studies of adolescents and emerging adults, with attention to the norms each youth enacts(ed), performs(ed), and embodies(ied) in Talltown. Each case study looks at how a particular youth might be put into Talltown community discourse, some much more positively than others. In finding they have been ascribed a particular social position, youth strategically respond to it, as these case studies show. Youth who occupy positions of high social status especially, tend to reproduce the norms by which they maintain their relatively high status. Youth in the middle, the vast majority by number, have to be creative to compete in the Talltown field, shaped as it is by larger fields, and so they respond with reworking and resilience. Those at the bottom can either struggle to get by (and thereby embody Talltown's dominant norms), or they can resist, through talk about seeing through the veil and understanding the myth of meritocracy for what it is.
Brandi

Brandi is a junior in high school and in her mid-teens. She is Caucasian and from a household she describes as of the lower-upper-class, which she links to the fact that her parents own and operate a business. Brandi's family is well respected and church going. She was born and raised in Talltown and, like her parents, is very involved in the community, particularly through the school, her church, and 4-H. Brandi is the third generation in her paternal extended family to reside in the Talltown area. Several individuals from the other side of her extended family on her mother's side have since come to the area as well, leaving Brandi with a fairly wide base of familial resources, though certainly not the largest one might find in Talltown.

Brandi is an adolescent of high social status, both among her peers and as seen by adults in the community. She is popular and has a boyfriend, not someone born and raised, like herself, but someone who is relatively new to Talltown. She has a confident and easy way of carrying herself in school, during class, in the halls, and at extra curricular events. As an adolescent of high social status, Brandi has the opportunity to occupy more than one social group and take up more than one high school social identity. This is, of course, helped along by the school's small population, but it is nevertheless something Brandi undertakes strategically. She is at once an "athlete," a "band geek," and "preppy." She also gets good grades and is in the honors classes, even the one that is held during the zero period, before the school day even begins, to which she travels for months out of the year on cold dark mornings. While some of Brandi's friends engage in underage alcohol consumption,
some having run-ins with local law enforcement in the process, Brandi has so far avoided trouble of this kind by instead spending her time doing other wholesome outdoor activities. As snow had come early the in the season when I interviewed Brandi, at the time she was spending a lot of her free time sledding and skiing. I observed Brandi and her siblings to spend a lot of time playing outdoors, a fact probably helped along by their parents' strict limits on television watching and other such forms of fun or entertainment.

Brandi finds herself positioned rather highly in the Talltown hierarchy, largely because of her family (i.e. class) background. In the performance and maintenance of such a position, and in anticipation of the relatively high social status Brandi will likely have in emerging adulthood, she strategizes in such a way as to maximize the benefit of her ascribed status. Like her parents, Brandi is active in the community, particularly in the institutions of the school and her church. This, she believes, is what explains her high social status. In talking about how the experience of Talltown differs from one individual to the next she said,

   You have to know the right people. If you don't, aren't involved in like a church or something in the town, you know people, it can definitely be an awful place to live. And if you don't play sports or anything in school and just, go home then it's definitely not a good place.

Brandi credits her high social status to what she does, to her own efforts regarding school and community involvement. She can point to her good grades, participation in a sports each season, and involvement with her church youth group as the reason she is successful in the adolescent social field and in terms of community assessment of the path she is on. Her good grades combined with her active extra curricular
schedule suggest that Brandi should be successful in pursuit of a college education. This is indeed what Brandi intends to do when she graduates high school, but where she will do this or what she will study is unclear at the moment. This is a reworking of her economic prospects, compared to if she stayed in Talltown after high school, and an embodiment of privilege and an recreation of her privileged position.

In looking ahead, past emerging adulthood, into her adulthood, Brandi envisions a professional, well-paid life, but not a fast-paced life. Originally she envisioned for herself a professional, well-paying career in publishing. But upon further investigation she discovered that she would be unlikely to find this kind of work outside the country's largest major metropolitan areas. And so she abandoned this idea because she felt the work could only lead to a life she does not desire to live. As she put it, "I hate the city." So it has been back to the career drawing board for Brandi. Presently she is considering different paths toward the medical field, one which will allow her to enter the workforce quickly, and one which would take longer to achieve, but is a higher status field. Though Brandi is drawn to the high status of a professional career, she also says, "I don't know if I wanna graduate when I'm 28 years old."

Brandi may not know what career she is ultimately after, but she lacks no confidence in her ability to obtain the education necessary for whatever professional career she may decide on through which she intends to maintain the relatively high social and economic status she has today. She says, "I might do a music scholarship or sports scholarship and see where that takes me." She assumes that she could just as
easily get either type of scholarship, in addition to one of the county scholarships she is also likely to qualify for. Maybe she will, but that remains to be seen. If she does, she will have further demonstrated her high status position among Talltown youth.

Brandi strategizes to support her high status position in her talk about returning to Talltown after college. She says, "I definitely wanna come back here after living away for a while." Brandi envisions raising children in Talltown someday because she likes the "community aspect" and "safety of it." She is unconcerned about what her potential future children might miss out on by living in Talltown, particularly exposure to diversity of people and ideas. She said,

I think going to public school you get exposed to a lot of things. So I think that would help. And I mean, going to the city even every once in a while for me is enough to get exposed.

Brandi sees her own plan to return to Talltown after college as different from what most of her classmates will choose. Although she sees most of them staying in Oregon, she sees herself as in the minority in wanting to make her adult life in Talltown. In both her plan to return, and her talk about this plan as different from that which most of her peers will undertake, Brandi reinforces her high status through the embodiment of the norm of community closeness.

In her good family name, her enjoyment of outdoor activities, her involvement in school, church, and 4-H, and her apparent hard work in educational pursuits, Brandi successfully embodies the dominant norms of the local Talltown field. In her good grades and plans for college and a professional career, she also embodies the dominant norms of the national field. When Brandi reaches emerging adulthood she is expected
to enroll at a university, be successful in her studies (i.e. graduate) perhaps even earn advanced post-secondary degree(s). At this point, emerging adult Brandi would be the sort of youth Talltown community leaders most want to see return.

Derek

Derek is Caucasian and in his mid-twenties. He describes his household of origin as middle-class cattle-ranchers. He is of the third generation of his family (on both sides of his family) to live in the Talltown area, and has lived there all but the years he was away at college, something his non-college educated parents encouraged. In high school he was very active in sports. He was also a leader in various other student clubs, something he continued when he went off to college. He described his group of friends growing up as "the goodie-goodies." He said,

The group that I hung out with were pretty much all students that were college bound. I hung out with a lot of kids that came, had similar ranching backgrounds as I did because we had something in common. I avoided, usually, the groups that were engaging in risky behavior because I was scared to death I'd get in trouble. Not only because I was scared to death of my parents, if I got in trouble, but I just did not want you know, I didn't want to get in trouble. I wanted to do good in school. Those were, I don't know, usually the kids that I hung out with were a lot of times kids that played sports and because they had a uh, athletic contract and they usually weren't goin' out and doin' things that were gonna 'cause them not to be able to play sports.

In his community involvement, experience in ranching, and avoidance of "trouble"

Derek the adolescent was quite successful in embodying local norms. He attributed this largely to his being brought up on a ranch. He explained,

I think that a lot of times kids that are raised on ranches learn how to do things, how to be capable, how to solve problems because they have to... I can remember driving a pickup for my dad while he was feeding cows for, when I
was you know, barely tall enough to even reach the and I can remember driving tractors, putting up hay when, you know, when I was 12 years old. I just think that um, you know there are a lot of really good skills to be learned and even, even soft skills just like, problem solving.

Today Derek continues to embody the identity of the family rancher, but he also works with "troubled" local youth. He goes to work Monday through Friday like so many other professionals, but has recently added is own cattle to the heard and intending to rake over the family operation at some point in the future.

The strategic payoff of Derek's adolescent and continued performance of dominant community norms is that today he is well positioned in the local status hierarchy. As such he experiences a sense of belonging in response to his successful embodiment of Talltown norms. He said,

I always felt really comfortable here. I had a lot of family, so that probably had somethin' to do with that... I really like outdoor-type activities. I like to be able to get away um, away from everybody and be out you know, by myself. And you can do that within 5 minutes of Talltown...I think almost every kid, when they're in high school wants to leave because they've been there their whole life...I just wanted you know, to see a little bit of the rest of the world...and having done that I decided that Talltown was a pretty darn good place.

In his mention of Talltown's outdoor natural and recreation amenities he discursively embodies these local norms. He also references his success in fields beyond Talltown, which are also an embodiment of the Talltown norm of college education and the norm of experiencing something of the world beyond Talltown during the transition to adulthood.

Today Derek has a Bachelor's degree in a field of scientific inquiry and is nearly finished with a Master's in teaching. In this regard he has been highly
successful in embodying norms, especially educational norms, of the national field. In obtaining this education and experience and then returning to live in Talltown after graduating college, to work in a professional field alongside ranching, Derek is a Talltown's success story. He at once demonstrates Talltown's ability to produce youth who will turn out to be successful adults, and its ability to maintain its local community character. Derek embodies the local field norm of community closeness, both in the act of returning to Talltown and in his plans for the family ranch. He said,

My parents have um, my family has a ranch here. My long-term goal was always to come back and at least be involved with it. Um, which meant having a job in town for right now. Um, so I think that I always planned on coming back, I just didn't know that it was gonna be as soon as it was... I bought 70 head of cows myself and so I you know, have a responsibility here.

Derek has a girlfriend who lives out of town, but is willing to come to Talltown so long as she can find work there. If that does happen, Derek may yet embody another of Talltown's dominant norms, that of the traditional family. If and when that happens, Derek can expect to continue to experience the sense of belonging that comes with his ascribed social position and re-creation of dominant norms.

Ann

Ann is approaching her mid-thirties. She is Caucasian and has Bachelor's and Master's degrees. She came to Talltown for the job she now holds, where she works as a professional in a public facility, in which she sometimes works with local youth. Ann applied for this job because it was in a place that suited her, specifically with regard to the natural amenities she wanted to live near. She has lived in the town for
fewer than five years and has no extended family in the area. Ann grew up in a suburb of a Midwestern city, which has a population of approximately of nearly 600,000 people, in a household where her mother had employment in a technical field and her father a trade. The suburbs are not the kind of place Ann speaks highly of. She much prefers the natural amenities and community lifestyle of a place like Talltown. In saying as much, she makes a strategic maneuver in asserting her place in the community. She said of the suburbs,

 Axis of evil comes to mind. I realize that is a reflection on my own growing up... I don't have a lot of nice things to say about suburban...people looking for a comfort in conformity...terrible land-use planning...I think in the suburbs it's harder, I think the suburbs is one of the hardest places to have a sense of community because even in urban centers when you're getting into urban neighborhoods, there's a lot of them that have a very community feel. It's a very particular personality to that community. And people do know their neighbors often. Um, whereas in the suburbs I feel like you know, a suburb in Iowa looks like a suburb in Nebraska, which looks like a suburb in Ohio. And, I think it's hard to develop that sense of a community... the residential are so compartmentalized that you don't get those sort of fun mixes that you get in both urban and rural places.

So despite not being born and raised in Talltown, Ann embodies the local norm of community closeness.

 Ann also embodies community closeness by virtue of her relationship with her live-in boyfriend, a member of a deeply-rooted and large Talltown extended family. This romantic connection, turned social connection with her boyfriend's family, bolsters Ann's already effective embodiment of the Talltown norm of community closeness. In fact, she was so good in this performance that, in her early days in town, older women from town tried to fix her up with local men, including the man who is today her boyfriend. She performed Talltown belonging so well that people began to
work to get her to fully "settle down" and marry, and ultimately, stay in Talltown. She said,

When I first came here the idea was that I was gonna be here temporarily. And this was a stepping stone on my career path...I could get um, pretty significant experience for a person my age, that I could then translate into another position elsewhere, where I could get paid more. And then I met [boyfriend] and so that's kind of complicated that plan a little bit...in some ways I could see us staying here for a very long time...and then I could also see us going somewhere else and also being happy there.

Ann says she might get married someday and she certainly talks about her future as though it involves the long-term presence of her boyfriend. In Ann's case, staying in Talltown because she married a local who wanted to stay, would involve a trade-off with the career side of her life. Where she currently works, Ann cannot move further up the pay and responsibility ladders.

Ann also embodies the other Talltown norms, particularly those of hard work via post-secondary education and leaving one's community to obtain this education alongside experience of the wider world. While in high school, Ann worked in retail. After high school she went to a state university, but took some time off after a year. She was then able to find some technical support work with an institution in the somewhat large city, outside of which she grew up. She also traveled across the country, taking in places from Wyoming to New York. Importantly, Ann went back to college after taking this break. She pursued a degree that appealed to her creatively and then another with somewhat more practical appeal. And, most importantly, she brought all this experience and knowledge with her to Talltown.
In one area Ann does deviate from Talltown norms, particularly that of family. One of the reasons people say they stay in Talltown is because it is "a good place to raise a family," but Ann does not want to have children. This and the local ceiling for her career-wise leaves her with perhaps fewer reasons to stay than some other people. In Ann's case, the longer she stays, the longer she embodies the norm of community closeness, of choosing Talltown despite having relatively more mobility than some other emerging adults. In doing so she recreates dominant Talltown norms even though she was not been born and raised there.

Katie

Katie is a sophomore at Talltown High School. She is in her mid-teens and reports a mixed-racial, American Indian and Caucasian, background. She lives in a household, which she describes as middle-middle-class, with her single father, an employee at the nearby prison. She is a relative newcomer to Talltown, having lived there less than five years, though her family has been in the area, as she puts it, "since the Oregon Trail," which is why she has some extended family in the area today. Katie came to Talltown following the strategic decision to try and qualify for one of the county scholarships. Before that she lived in a very large city in the Southwest with her mother.

Katie is currently a participant in extra curricular activities, through a creative arts group, but does not play sports. She does not spend her free time working on ranches, either for pay or for fun. Nor is she a 4-H participant. The things that interest
Katie are, for the most part, not typical pastimes in Talltown. Katie spends quite a lot of her free time viewing Anime, "Japanese cartoons and animations." If not doing that, she is "on the computer" to "check on stuff," largely about Anime. Katie's interest in something so culturally not Talltown, is perhaps a strategic deflection of some of Otherness she may feel being of mixed racial background in the very Caucasian community of Talltown. In choosing to spend her time in this activity and not those that are dominant in Talltown, Katie resiliently aligns herself with fields of power beyond Talltown.

Katie is a good student. She also intends to go to college, and so embodies both local and national adolescent educational norms. But in her vision of her future self, work, and home, Katie has thoroughly left Talltown. She said,

I wanna go to college for sure. After that I wanna become and English teacher and go to Japan and teach English...if I was somehow to change my heart it would go to Marine Biology, but it was still be in Japan or around that area.... I like the way their style is...how respectable they are to people and...the respect to keep places clean and to respect someone's house by taking off your shoes and everything. And I've always found it interesting on how their traditions are.

In these goals Katie is quite clearly oriented away from Talltown. When specifically asked if she can envision herself returning to Talltown to live at some point in the future, Katie said, "No. It's a place where I envision myself to visit a lot. But not to live." If someday Katie does earn her degree and achieves her dream of teaching English in Japan, she will have parlayed resilience into reworking, and accessed another field of practice, which she, at least for now, sees as more tenable.
**Kendra**

Kendra is a junior at Talltown High School. She is in her mid-teens, Caucasian, and from a lower-middle-class household, in which her mother works in the service sector and her father is an employee at the nearby prison. Kendra's is the third generation in her family to live in Talltown and she has lived there her entire life. She also has some extended family in the area. Being "born and raised" in Talltown, Kendra has a bit of a strategic advantage over people like Katie. She has had an entire lifetime to practice embodying the norm of community closeness, which is something she has come to really value about Talltown. She said, "It's kinda nice to like, know everybody that's around and like, know people when you go in the store and stuff." Kendra also embodies the norm of community involvement more so than Katie, through her involvement in school sports, one each season. Kendra said, "I'm really into sports." This involvement is a motivating factor for Kendra not to participate in underage alcohol consumption as some of her peers are doing. She avoids that scene and says, "If you do that kind of stuff people are gonna find out about it so there's not really any point in like, risking getting in trouble." This is a strategic decision on Kendra's part, which involves trading one particular field of youth social interaction, one that has been made particularly popular through media, specifically avoid the "trouble" that getting caught would lead to, not only at school and with parents, but with one's place in community discourse.
After high school Kendra would like to attend a state university, so long as she continues to get good grades, and pursue training for a career in medicine. After that she says,

I kinda wanna move like far away like way out of state or something... Just to see like, how much different it is to live somewhere else I guess....Just 'cause like, I know my mom like, she never went anywhere after she, well because she had me like in high school and she always wanted to move away, when she was younger and then she never got to.

While Kendra is not opposed to returning to Talltown to live and work, she does not think it is likely to happen. She said, "It might just be hard to get a job here because it's just small and they don't need like a bunch" of people of her intended career. If she does return to live in Talltown, Kendra imagines it will be between college and when she begins her career elsewhere. So although Kendra performs some Talltown norms successfully, her planned path into adulthood is likely to take her elsewhere. While she is an adolescent in Talltown she occupies a very high status, but upon leaving and not returning, those who are now her peers, other college-bound adolescents, will surpass her in the local hierarchy. And yet local discourse will still position her more highly than those who stay after high school. Even though she is not likely to make her adult life there, Kendra will have demonstrated Talltown's skill in producing successful young people, particularly of the college student variety. In the process she will also reproduce the dominant norms of Talltown.
Jesse

Jesse is a former resident of Talltown. He is a gay Caucasian man in his early thirties, who describes his current socioeconomic status as upper-lower-class. He moved to Talltown when he was in grade school following his stepfather's government job. His mother has a college degree and works with youth of Talltown. Jesse has no extended family in the area, except for that which is through his stepfather, who is of a well-established deeply rooted local family.

Jesse embodies some Talltown norms while also embodying some counter norms. He did grow up embodying the local norm of outdoor activity, particularly playing with his several siblings. He said, "We didn't live to far away from a big field...there was also a stream...through our area of town. So played outside a lot." Beginning in adolescence Jesse also embodied the norm of hard work, through his summer employment at a local business that continued into college.

Jesse chose not to participate in the "almost singular focus on sports...and ranching," which he sees as dominating Talltown youth activity. He preferred to participate in extra-curricular activities in the arts, which he found largely few and far between in Talltown schools, particularly as teachers came and went. The Talltown community as a whole, Jesse sees as less than encouraging of and engaged with the arts. He said, "There is this overwhelming attitude you know, towards the arts like, [sing-songily] "Oh, so you're puttin' on a play...It's just kind of like this silly cute thing... It's just to go see their kid up on stage saying you know, a couple badly delivered lines."
As an adolescent, Jesse was not very successful in embodying the norm of community closeness. He was not particularly popular or outgoing, particularly by high school. He said, "I tended to be more friends with the uh, with the nerdy folk." He also said, "Not many people knew that I was gay when I was in high school. I think there were people who wondered, but I was not as uh, obviously gay as this other guy." Among those of Jesse's high school friends and siblings, whom I also interviewed, people either knew or suspected that Jesse was gay, even while he was not out. In this way Jesse was marked as different in adolescent social discourse.

Jesse, whose college-educated mother encouraged him from a young age to get a degree, today successfully embodies the norm of post-secondary education. He talks about his mother especially encouraging her children to get a college education while young, because she had to do so later in life. Jesse also had a college fund, money set aside for the purpose of paying for college and so came to see college as an unquestioned assumption. With such encouragement, Jesse did well enough in school to earn a high school diploma, win one of the county scholarships, be admitted to college, and complete a university degree program. But in the program he chose, Jesse embodied educational norms counter to those dominant in Talltown. Jesse pursued not a natural or agricultural science field or medical field, as so many youth of Talltown are said to prefer. Jesse pursued a degree in the arts. Since graduating Jesse has worked in his field in Oregon and out of state. He has also worked outside his field, in retail and also clerical positions. At present, he is again working in his field.
Jesse's career is not one he could pursue in Talltown. Today he lives in a large Western city, which he likes very much, and has not ruled out moving to one of the mega-cities of the Western U.S. at some point. He does not see himself ever going back to live in Talltown. He said,

I've often imagined what it would take to have me move back there and the only thing is if my life got so awful and like everything just fell apart, like I lost my job, I didn't have any money...I needed to go someplace and just escape and live in a shell for a while or something. That would be my reason for going back to Talltown.

Jesse can say with confidence that Talltown is not a place that he would, today, want to make his life. And yet there was a time when Jesse's comfort zone extended no farther than Talltown and the prospect of leaving was daunting. He talks about the feeling of comfort he found growing up in close community how that familiarity turned to anxiety when it was time to go to college, but which passed within about 24 hours of being at college.

Jesse's story is one of increasing awareness of the world around him and of finding that world increasingly more appealing than the rural community in which he grew up. He tells one story that encapsulates this particularly well. He said,

I remember...the election between Bush Senior and Clinton...it was election night and we were watching... and I said to my mom..."Well, Bush's gonna win right?" And she goes, "Well, we don't know that for sure." And it's like, "But nobody's a Democrat." I mean...of course Bush was gonna win, I mean, everybody's a Republican, right? And like that was like, I remember what she said it was like, "Well, half the country out there is Democrats so Bush might not win." And he didn't... I just remember so earnestly and I remember the feeling of, "Well, he's gonna win, right? I mean, this is just like silly. He's gonna win, Bush's gonna win. Everybody's Republican." [Laughs]
Having now spent time in other places with exposure to different ideas, Jesse has found that he likes living in such places so today he chooses to reside away from Talltown. In doing so he can pursue his career path, but he also avoids a socio-political climate that he finds untenable. He says, "People are extremely closed-minded in many ways... it's extremely socially conservative." He went on to say, "Socially it's just, it's extremely conservative and there's... frankly a lot of bigotry and racism...just kind of general closed-minded to other cultures." This socio-political climate is perhaps particularly daunting for Jesse, given the way Talltown community discourse positions heterosexuality as a norm, and some of it positions homosexuality as wrong or sinful. Jesse went off to college and expanded his horizons, then chose a career that has taken him out of Talltown. In doing so he has reworked the terrain of his existence, particularly regarding the freedom to be open about his sexuality and to pursue his desired career, and found, what is for him, a much more viable life elsewhere.

Jose

Jose is a senior at Talltown High School. He is in his late-teens, is Hispanic, and is a from a household he described as middle-middle-class, in which his mother works in food service, and his father works on a ranch. Jose has several siblings and came to Talltown, with his family from Mexico, when he was a year old. His family learned about Talltown, and eventually came to live there, through Jose's uncle who
was first in the family to come the area several decades ago. Several other relatives, though none of Jose's own age, are also currently residing in Talltown.

Jose is friendly, helpful, and well liked by other students. He may struggle in school a bit, in some subjects more than others, but he is polite and seems well liked by teachers and administrators. Jose spends much of his free time working on ranches with his friends. He says, "We like to cowboy together, and go buck out—and bulls—and ride colts together." In these ways Jose is very successful in embodying Talltown norms of the cowboy and ranching, and the broader norm of hard work. In the work he does on the ranches of others, and the relationships he has built with these ranch owners and managers, Jose also embodies the norm of community closeness.

Jose strategically sidesteps his socially constructed ethnic difference, and resiliently asserts a position of belonging in the community, with talk about Talltown as a non racially or ethnically prejudiced or discriminatory place. Jose says that he has not experienced prejudice or discrimination because he is Hispanic, though other Hispanics and Caucasiains of Talltown can and do talk about instances of both. This is an example of resilience. Jose puts himself into discourse as part of a community that does not discriminate against him and in so doing he downplays his ethnic difference, strategically affirming the status and belonging that he has carved out as a cowboy.

Jose also invokes the post-secondary education norm when he talks about wanting to go to a college, nearly 300 miles from Talltown. Financing, however, may ultimately prove a problem for Jose. His grades are not competitive enough to win one of the county scholarships, though he did attend all four years of high school in
the county. In an attempt to rework the college financial situation, Jose has participated in 4-H and FFA throughout his adolescence, raising and selling animals in order to save for this education.

Ultimately Jose wants to continue to work in ranching. Ideally he would have his own ranch "somewhere in the desert," somewhere like Talltown, but he would also be happy owning a business that catered to the ranching and cowboy life, perhaps a saddle shop. If he cannot acquire the capital to purchase a ranch, because he does not stand to inherit one, or otherwise find the funds to start a business, Jose says, "I could go work for a lot of people" in Talltown, having cultivated relationships with area ranchers by working for them during adolescence. Here again he demonstrates resilience, in seeing himself as either the successful ranch or shop owner or as a ranch hand, a job he has been garnering experience in since adolescence. While Jose remains in Talltown and continues to work hard at ranching, while he continues to desire a life in "God's country" (which, he says, Talltown is), he successfully embodies many of Talltown's dominant norms, even if college is not one of them. Jose's being a cowboy is his way of playing the local game and fitting in well. This is also potentially a way that Jose works around the fact that he does not fit as well ethnically, being an ethnic minority in a mostly Caucasian community, and/or the fact that he does not fit as well in terms of his class background, coming as he does from more or a working-class than middle-class household. Jose's father is not a ranch owner, but a ranch hand.
Sofia

Sofia is a Hispanic woman in her early twenties who is divorced from her high school sweetheart. She has lived in the area since she was a toddler, except for a few stretches of several months at a time in other states, during which time she and her family followed her father's work as a ranch hand. She has no extended family in the Talltown area. Her mother works cleaning a local business and neither of her parents graduated high school.

As an adolescent, Sofia embodied some Talltown norms. Some, she did not. For instance, growing up, Sofia did not participate in extra-curricular activities. She was also one of the "troublemakers," those who "didn't want to come to school and always making up excuses and getting themselves into trouble out of school." Sofia's choice of adolescent social group could be construed as resistance to the ethnic Otherness she may have felt growing up in the largely Caucasian community. Although as an adolescent Sofia's place in community discourse was as someone "at risk" of "getting stuck," she also performed the norm of hard work, having worked part-time jobs in food service since she was an adolescent and legally allowed to do so, still managing to graduate high school on schedule.

Following high school, Sofia attempted to embody the norm of leaving one's community for post-secondary education and training, and enrolled in cosmetology school for a period of a couple of months. Finding that was not the path she wanted to take, she tried out life in another small Oregon city. After another couple of months, she found she did not like it there either, and returned to Talltown.
Since returning to Talltown, having been mostly unsuccessful in obtaining any degree or certification for post-secondary education and training, Sofia has continued to embody the norm of hard work through her job in a local restaurant. The restaurant she works for, being a franchise (one of only two in Talltown), offers incentives for employees that pursue post-secondary education in Business Management. Sofia has taken advantage of this program since returning to Talltown and is currently enrolled in taking distance education classes online. Ultimately she would like to open her own restaurant. She believes she could do this in Talltown, but she also entertains the idea of moving to a large city to see what opportunity she might find there. Still, when she envisions her future as a mother, it is in a wholesome and safe place like Talltown that she sees herself raising children. Sofia's case demonstrates that although an adolescent may be seen as "getting stuck" or "troubled," that course can be altered with the experience of leaving one's community of origin, the pursuit of post-secondary education or training, and the embodiment of hard work.

*Lori*

Lori is a single Caucasian woman in her early twenties. She is from a long-established Talltown family that she reports to be middle-class. Her mother is employed in a clerical field and her father in a trade. Except for the time she spent away at college, Lori has lived in Talltown since she was a toddler. She has several siblings and no shortage of extended family in the area. As she said of her father's side of the family, "My great-grandpa's family settled the open valley, so we've been
here forever." This is an ascribed social advantage for Lori, she has a "name" that is
discursively prestigious by virtue of generations spent in stewardship of the land. The
result is an extremely large extended family. As Lori said, at "the last family barbeque
there was like, twenty-eight of us I think." Though such engagement with her very
large extended family, Lori easily performs the norms of community closeness and
involvement. Growing up Lori was also very involved in school extra-curricular
activities, including sports, and her church youth group. Growing up Lori helped out
with a family business and babysat since she was in her early teens. She also summer
employment with a government agency. Today she continues embody the norms of
community involvement and hard work through involvement in local business and
philanthropic organizations and serving as a volunteer coach.

In fields beyond Talltown, Lori has been somewhat less successful. Having
been encouraged by teachers and her parents, Lori approached the end of her high
school career considering college the only acceptable next step for herself. During her
college career, though, she struggled to find a campus that suited her. Lori lived near
and attended several different institutions, two community colleges that were in-state
and one university that was out-of-state. In addition to the struggle to find a campus
that suited her, Lori also had some trouble finding suitable new social groups. She
said of the community college she attended approximately one hundred miles from
Talltown, "There's a lot of Talltown kids up there. That's mostly who I hung out with:
Talltown kids. So, I didn't meet tons of people in college." She went on to say, "I
drove home every other weekend from college anyway so I just decided that I should
probably just move back." Although she had been a fairly popular adolescent, as a student athlete and individual with a "name," Lori was less socially successful in college.

Lori was similarly not so successful in college academically. Also, although she went to college, Lori has not yet obtained a college degree. As she puts it, "I have some college...I have three years of college and I'm one class from a Bachelor's Degree." As to when she might complete this degree she said, "Hopefully in the Spring" by completing her remaining coursework through a community college approximately 100 miles from Talltown, to which she would commute.

Emerging adult Lori successfully embodies the Talltown norms of hard work and community closeness, despite her incomplete performance of the norm of going away to college. When Lori returned to Talltown after leaving college, she secured full-time employment. She only left that position when the business she now runs came up for sale. As she said, "I knew I wanted to own my own business." This is a reworking strategy, by which Lori avoids the fact that she has not completed her college degree, by playing the role of a small business owner in a town said to have a need for such people. This is also, perhaps, a reworking strategy that is particularly available to Lori, by virtue of her "name."

Though her status as a small business owner is widely respected in Talltown, her business is not profitable enough to be deemed a success in places other than a small town. Lori is finding owning her own small business financially challenging. She is currently not drawing a fully paycheck, something doubly frustrating given that
she has college loans to pay back. She said, "I'm just runnin' off my savings and then hopefully you make it." For now it seems that Lori’s social network and cultural capital can only get her so far in the field of small town entrepreneurial success. For the moment, she also finds it necessary to work part time at the desk of a local automotive business.

Despite Lori’s current investment in the performance of hard work, she does not see herself working full-time indefinitely. She says, "I only plan on working full time until I have a family." Here Lori provides an example of gender intersecting with the myth of meritocracy. Lori enjoys her work and wants to keep doing it, but after a certain point, her priority will become having and raising a family. However, as Lori is not yet married, nor does she have a boyfriend, this part of her plan is yet some ways off. If she eventually does marry and have children, particularly if she raises them in Talltown, she will have successfully embodied another Talltown norm, that of family. This is a goal Lori is strategically working toward, by being involved in community organizations, and by putting the information out that she is single and looking. When she does eventually marry and have children, Lori wants to raise them in Talltown, which she feels is more beneficial for children than growing up in a more populous place where there might be "four hundred kids or whatever" in one graduating class.
Ben

Ben is senior at Talltown High School. He is 18 years old, Caucasian, and from a very low-income household, which he describes as, "about as low as it can get." His mother has been chronically unemployed, though his siblings have periodically found work in the Talltown restaurants. Ben "never had a dad," but lives with his mother, siblings, and some members of his extended family on his mother's side. He also has a relative in the nearby prison. Ben's grandparents were first in his family to move to Talltown, about the age that they retired. The rest of Ben's family, who comprise his household, came to Talltown all together several months before he was born. He has lived there all but one year in his childhood when his family moved to a bigger city elsewhere in Oregon.

Adolescent Ben had difficulty embodying Talltown norms. He says, "I started drinking at eight years old. And I started partying [drinking and smoking marijuana] at twelve." Eventually he was, "Hangin' out, partying all the time...like every day after school." The fact that Ben engaged in these behaviors, the frequency with which he engaged in them, the early age at which he started them, and his family's class background, all tend to link Ben to Talltown community discourse about adolescents who are "at risk" of "trouble," and on a path toward "getting stuck." But recently, Ben has moved himself away from his partying social group in an attempt to rework the conditions of his existence and set himself upon a path toward post-secondary education by embodying the norm of hard work. Ben is further reworking his situation, through a recently acquired internship, with a local organization, in his
envisioned future field. As soon as he has fulfilled certain course requirements this organization will then pay him to enroll at a community college approximately one hundred miles away.

Ben's plan is to obtain a two-year degree "and then transferring to another school." His sights for this second institution are set quite high, at an internationally acclaimed university. In his ability to see himself as successful, let alone highly successful, in academia, Ben resiliently embodies the Talltown and national norms of college education. Ben also resiliently embodies the norm of seeing something of the world outside Talltown when he talks about wanting to "go overseas and go check out some different countries." We will have to wait and see what path Ben pursues and how successful he is upon it, before we will know if Ben's strategies are anything more than resilience.

In the meantime there is still a lot of uncertainty in Ben's life. Will he be able to pay for college? Will his recent effort in his studies be enough to prepare him for college? Perhaps not, which is why his backup plan is enlisting in the Army. But even if he "goes somewhere" and gets some kind of education or training, if he returned, he may still not be able to shed the baggage of his adolescent identity.

*Julie*

Julie is a Caucasian woman in her early twenties. She describes both her household of origin and her current household as low-income. Her mother is a small business owner and a high school dropout, who did not grow up in the area, but came
there in her early twenties. Julie's father did grow up in Talltown, his parents having been the first generation in that family to live there. He was employed in the timber industry, prior to his passing, when Julie was in her early childhood. Julie grew up in one of the unincorporated towns smaller still than Talltown, about fifteen miles from Talltown. Today Julie lives in Talltown proper. Except for one year she spent living and working in the nearest place that might be called an urban center, a city of approximately 20,000 people in a neighboring county, Julie has lived in the Talltown area all her life. She also has extended family in the area, on both her mother's and father's sides of the family.

Growing up and attending a school even smaller than the one in Talltown, Julie really felt like her classmates were extended family. And yet there were still smaller social groupings among the students. Although her small school was without "a very diverse population" Julie tended to hang out with "the more diverse people," including those that were non-Caucasian, not popular, from low-income households, artsy, or homosexual. Today, when many of those she was close with growing up have gone away to college or otherwise left, Julie is largely without a peer-group, through which she might be more actively engaged with others in Talltown. She says, "I think it would really be neat if I could get together with mothers, young mothers my age and you know, have a community." Julie is also politically left-leaning, something that is counter to Talltown norms, specifically the norm of conservative politics. This is something Julie is very much aware of. She says of Talltown, "It's a very conservative environment," one which appears to limit her ability to establish a peer group.
Julie did participate in some extra curricular activist organizations growing up, but she did not participate in sports. Although Julie graduated high school, she has yet to pursue any post-secondary education or training. She would like to take some classes toward a career in the medical field and is hoping to do so at the local hospital early next year. Julie has had only limited success in embodying the Talltown norm of hard work. She has held a range of jobs, "odd jobs" in the area, and is presently not working, but staying home with her infant while her boyfriend works.

Julie currently lives in trailer in the lower-income side of Talltown, with her boyfriend, who works a service job in town, and their infant. As a parent, she embodies the Talltown norm of family, but in not being married she also embodies a norm that is counter to that which is dominant in Talltown. Julie may yet marry, but for now she is putting that step off so that if and when she is able to start a post-secondary program, she will have access to better financial aid, based on her single-mother status. In the meantime, her primary strategy for negotiating status is one of resilience. In seeing herself as a parent, she is free, at least for the time being, not to see herself as an emerging adult who is not in college, nor working. Julie's case is a bit contradictory, a bit ambiguous. She seems to see through the myth of meritocracy and embrace the life she feels will make her happy. She has decided that being a mother trumps everything else at the moment, though she still has some post-secondary educational and employment goals. But she is acting counter to a number of important norms in following this particularly gendered pathway, and as a result she is nevertheless judged harshly under the myth of meritocracy.
Beth

Beth is a 26-year old Caucasian woman from a household she describes as upper-lower-class. Growing up, her father had steady service sector work while her mother worked several part-time service sector jobs at once. Some of Beth's extended family moved to Talltown before her immediate family did, when Beth was in her middle childhood, and some of these relatives still reside there. Beth and her family came to Talltown from another small town in the northern part of a neighboring Western state. Unlike some other Talltown youth, Beth does not have the advantage of having a large and local extended family network, nor does she have the advantage of having a "name." Reflecting on how her household of origin was viewed by other residents of Talltown she said, "Because we're this class and we always had tons of kids at our house...it was 'Oh, they're doing drugs,'" something Beth patently denies ever taking place.

Beth dropped out of high school when she was in her mid-teens. She had been in a car accident and obtained an injury, which required surgery and left her with temporary limited mobility. During her recovery she was unable to go to school and was home schooled because "they were doing that whole, charge the parents if the kids don't come to school" thing at the time. As Beth's mobility improved she went to work part-time. Eventually she went to work full-time and the home schooling "just kind of went out the window." To date Beth has not obtained her GED. As she says, "I even have the book at home. And I've started on it and then I've just never finished it."
As Beth grew into an adolescent in Talltown she found it "limited" for youth. She says, "We used to have to just come up with things to make our own fun." For Beth, this meant doing, a "lot of drinking of drinking," which she apparently sees not as problematic, given that she "never got into any of the drugs" though other youth she knew did. Adolescent Beth hung out with an older crowd, "in their twenties," which she described as "considered kind of like the bad group, even though we weren't, we just, we weren't goodie-goodie... we didn't have the right last names...or financial status." As with Ben, adolescent Beth's free time activities positioned her within the Talltown discursive themes of "trouble." Meanwhile her high school dropout status discursively positions her as "stuck."

Beth has not strategized in the form of obtaining her GED, which would be an example of reworking, but she nevertheless strategizes. Emerging adult Beth resiliently embodies the Talltown norm of hard work, as she has since leaving high school, seeing herself primarily as a laborer, not as a would-be student. Over the years she has had several jobs and acquired new knowledge about herself and the kinds of work she enjoys in each position. She describes herself as "one of those people that after I do a job for so long it's like I get bored with it and I wanna try somethin' new." But Beth has never had the luxury of choosing a position purely because it is of interest. She has had to work. Beth clearly embodies Talltown norm of hard work. And yet, her class background, derived largely from her high school dropout status, puts her into community discourse about youth who are "stuck."
Beth talks about "almost" moving away to another Western state (one in which she had never lived before) when her life was tough. "Work had died off" and she had just experienced the end of a relationship. But rather than reworking her situation by moving, she has decided to stay in order to be closer to her sister's children. Beth does not believe she can have children of her own. She says, "I would love to have kids. I actually assumed by now I would, but I don't think I can." She wants to be a parent, the ultimate embodiment of the Talltown norm of family. Beth was married once, to a man with children and her current boyfriend is also a father. Though the road to parenthood has been rocky for Beth so far, she nevertheless resiliently performs the role of nurturer, as much as she can.

Beth's marriage ended in divorce after only a few years. She described arriving at this decision together with her then-spouse, "It was mutual...the feeling wasn't there." However she says, "He is still my best friend." Today Beth and her ex-husband live just a few streets away from each other and even "share a dog...She lives with him and comes and stays with me." Beth does not want to be married again. She says, "It's too much work to try and get everything changed if you divorce." She does however, have new boyfriend of a couple of months, someone not originally from Talltown, with whom she co-resides. He too is a hard worker, putting in long days going out to, working at, and returning from the natural gas pipeline being put in across the area. Even if she never gets her GED, she may yet rework her status through re-marriage.
Carter

Carter is a high school graduate in his early twenties. He is a lifelong resident of Talltown with lots of extended family in the area going back many generations. Carter disliked school as an adolescent and has not pursued any post-secondary education, though he talks about possibly enrolling in a vocational program to learn taxidermy. Since leaving high school Carter has found seasonal employment on the fire crew of one of the federal agencies with offices in Talltown. Beyond this, his life is much the same as it was when he was an adolescent. He continues to live with his father and works with him some on the ranch he manages. He continues to hang out with the same friends who have also stayed in Talltown after high school, and together they continue to kick back and relax by drinking, usually outdoors.

Carter the adolescent often found himself on the wrong side of adult authority figures, including teachers, administrators, and police. One recounted incident involved Carter being getting into a confrontation, which culminated in Carter hitting a school administrator. Carter's behavior in this instance is quite clearly outright resistance. His hyper-masculine, cowboy, anti-school identity got the better of him. Fortunately for Carter, the administrator pressed no charges. Carter's father, meanwhile, reportedly did not look upon this incident as particularly problematic. Carter, the emerging adult, no longer has to mind the authority of people from the school, though he still has a strong dislike for the local police, with whom he has had some run-ins about underage alcohol consumption and drinking and driving. These
post-high school run-ins have solidified Carter's being put into Talltown discourse in a position of "trouble."

Carter seems to see through the myth of meritocracy. Carter sees those like himself, those who do not go off to college, but who stay after high school, as those who are the hardest workers. By contrast, those who go off to college, those who supposedly worked hard in school, are "spoiled." So although Carter does not question the value of hard work, that supposed tool of meritocracy, neither does he buy that those youth who turn into the most successful adults are those that worked the hardest. In seeing himself as among the hardest working, he resists the normative power of the myth of meritocracy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we looked closely at several Talltown youth, each of whom could be said to embody certain positions in the Talltown youth hierarchy. We explored how class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality all intervened in people's lives, despite the assertions of the myth of meritocracy that ours is an open society. Also in this chapter looked in some depth at specific examples of how youth negotiate position in the local and larger fields. The patterns that have emerged in this and the preceding findings chapters will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.
Chapter Six: Discussion of Findings

*Talltown Norms*

Talltown youth are disciplined by ideas, which they internalize as norms, and use to strategize within various fields of practice, especially ideas about kinds of places, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. This is a disciplinary power, which involves each of Foucault's (1997) three processes, which are evident in discourse of and about Talltown youth. Talltown youth discourse reveals a keen awareness of surveillance by adults, including, but not limited to, one's parents, other people's parents, teachers, and police. They are also disciplined within a culturally specific "mass of behavior" (Foucault 1997) that is part Talltown community culture, part popular U.S. youth culture, but held together by the myth of meritocracy. Talltown youth are also subject to a "describable individuality," which is "a means of control" (Foucault 1997:91), by which peers and adults in the community put them into discourse (Foucault 1980). In Talltown there are many ways of describing individuality, including "born and raised," having a "name," being a "cowboy," or "Mexican." Recognition and categorization of such individual and describable traits occur in particular obligatory moments. One minor Talltown obligatory moment is that of the wave when passing another driver on the road, which symbolizes community closeness. Other obligatory moments have much greater significance.

In this chapter I will discuss my findings regarding Talltown norms of place, community, and class, including the ways in which youth come to understand and
interpret and them, and then use them in their strategic negotiations of social position.

I will then discuss the emic Talltown youth hierarchy as I have understood it, and describe the qualities and behaviors with which Talltown youth are assessed. In this section I will pause the elaborate as to how Talltown adolescents come to be assessed with processual terms, while Talltown emerging adults come to be assessed with status terms. I will then describe the emergent patterns in how Talltown youth respond to the forces that structure their lives. Lastly in this chapter I will discuss the significance of my work, particularly as it contributes to theoretical and conceptual gaps in the literature on rural youth and the strategic negotiation of hierarchy.

**Place**

Norms of place, of rurality, are important in the Talltown community practice and discourse, and so there are several discursive themes through which people engage these norms. Appreciation for the Talltown landscape is one such theme, the embodiment of which includes outdoor recreation activities, and may also include working out of doors. This is a theme that can be used freely, by anyone in the community who might want to pick it up and use it to assert their belonging in Talltown. Asserting an appreciation for the natural beauty that is the Talltown landscape is still strategic, even if one does not work or recreate outdoors.

The themes of ranching and of being a cowboy highlight the gender differences that exist within the Talltown community. Both the rancher and the cowboy are masculine cultural constructs. They are more symbolically available to
young men of Talltown than they are to its young women. Talltown men seem more likely to become ranch owners and operators than young women. And the cowboy is an especially iconic masculine figure in the U.S. There is, however, a complementary role that women can play, which nevertheless supports the theme of ranching, being a homemaker in a ranching family. This involves more than merely caring for a home and children. It involves working alongside husbands with the cattle as needed, even helping out in other economic endeavors of the patriarchal ranching family, as Megan does. Enactment of a rancher or cowboy identity, and the complementary homemaker role, all reinforce the norm of Talltown as a rural place, especially its ranching character, and the associated norms of hard work and traditional families.

The rancher and cowboy occupy different locations in the Talltown social hierarchy. The rancher has status steeped in time and in stewardship of the land. He is a landowner, and the owner of many head of cattle. He has a historical tie to the land, forged through the inheritance of property down through the generations. Today, those who stand to inherit ranches have sufficient access to financial capital, and opportunity and encouragement in the cultivation of human capital, to be able to attend college. Given the increasing cultural emphasis on university education as a key to social and economic success, the norm today is for future ranchers to be college educated. The cowboy, on the other hand, is a laborer. He may resiliently see himself tougher and harder working than the rancher, but he is tied to the work, not the land or a particularly legacy of place. Jose, a Hispanic cowboy in his late teens, may talk about going to college, community college in particular. He has worked to save
money for this over the years, but his future educational endeavors are as yet uncertain, particularly when compared to that of a young man his age who stands to inherit a ranch and has been groomed for college as a means to improving or making the future of the family ranch more secure. The cowboy and the rancher, despite their similar cultural emphases, reflect the class-based differences that exist within the Talltown community.

Indigeneity is a discursive theme that highlights the ethnic differences identifiable in norms of place. Particularly important is the idea of being "born and raised." To claim this particular local identity is to embody ideas about indigeneity, in particular that authority of place is something established over time. This is a pattern seen also in the particular status of ranching families. Living the whole of one's growing up years in a particular place, makes one a kind of authority on that place, and an expert on the performance of local norms, even if one does not embody all of them personally. "Born and raised" Talltown youth have the advantage of familiarity with local cultural knowledge, which they can use in putting relative newcomers into discourse, in social positions somewhat less prestigious than their own "born and raised" position.

Community

Norms of community are also important in Talltown discourse and practice. As with norms of place, there are several discursive themes through which youth strategize around norms of community. Prominent among these is community
closeness. This is enacted in several ways. Talltown residents embody community
closeness in the intimate social gatherings in one another's homes, which are the norm
for adolescents and emerging adults. Those who are part of large local extended
family groups and who socialize periodically in these groups, in the form of family
reunions, for instance, are similarly ritually enacting the norm of community
closeness, via the bonds of kinship.

The meaning of community closeness also incorporates a sense of social
openness. Community closeness is therefore also put into discourse through talk
about Talltown as a welcoming and inclusive community. Particularly noteworthy is
the fact that the Talltown's populations' relative racial and ethnic homogeneity is
discursively linked to the idea of Talltown being a non-prejudiced and non-
discriminatory place.

The discursive theme of Talltown as welcoming and inclusive is a particularly
useful pathway for strategizing. One can strategically use this idea to side-step, or
work around, one's ethnic difference. The community norm of ethnicity then, is not
something to be much talked about or paid attention to. Thus when people comply
with this norm, and do not draw attention to ethnic or other differences, they are
strategically maneuvering in order to align themselves more firmly within a position
of Talltown belonging. Complying with this norm constitutes maintaining the norm of
community closeness, which is what maintains the boundaries of belonging.

Community is about closeness, but it is also about involvement and
engagement. This norm too, is discursively enacted in several ways. One way is with
the theme of helpfulness. Thus local businesses put out collection tins for families fallen on hard times, as from unexpected illness or death, or a house fire. When they see people stranded along the side of the road, people of Talltown stop to help. They let neighbors shower at their homes when their hot water heaters are broken. Talltown residents are also giving of their time. They volunteer and serve in local government and on the school board. They are members of social and philanthropic organizations, and serve in student council, and as FFA officers. Enacting the norm of community involvement, occupying such service positions can be yet another strategic maneuver in Talltown. Those who perform such roles may be counted among the highest status individuals in the community in part for what they do for the community, but also for the personal sacrifice they are seen to make in the process of going above and beyond the work they otherwise do to make a living, or the work they do as a student. In this way these individuals not only strategize with the norm of community involvement, but also with the norm of hard work.

Among adolescents, the norm of community involvement takes on a highly organized form. Adolescent community involvement primarily occurs through organized extra curricular activities, usually through the school, but possible also through churches and other community organizations. The norm of community involvement is reinforced in school athletics in several ways: most people who go out for a team make the cut in this small school, so "everyone" gets to play; local businesses make donations and sponsor fundraisers in support of teams; some events, like home football games, are widely attended. The effort that youth and adults of
Talltown put into these activities, reiterates for adolescents that as members of the Talltown community, they are expected to participate and to be involved in their community. Thus community involvement is a norm around which youth maneuver and strategize. In finding ways to be seen socializing or otherwise engaging with other members of the community, youth align themselves with the dominant community discourse and avoid being put into discourse in the marginalized position of someone who has essentially dropped out of the community.

Class

Norms of class are also important in Talltown, especially norms of middle-classness. Although consumerism is a part of this, as evidenced in people's out of town shopping trips and online shopping orders, middle-classness in Talltown is not particularly consumeristic, certainly no more than any other place in the U.S. and probably less than some places. The most important norms of middle-classness in Talltown are those revolving around work, including the work of cultivating human capital.

In Talltown discourse, as in the wider U.S., the ideal preparation for the world of middle-class work is a four-year university degree. Talltown youth encounter this norm in several ways, but particularly important are the county scholarship foundations, classroom emphasis, and popular media's focus to the college student as the subject of storyline and new report. Some youth also encounter this norm in the form of encouragement from parents and teachers. Ideally the degree is undertaken in
the academic year following high school graduation, somewhere away from Talltown, where youth can find themselves by virtue of a prolonged transition to adulthood. It might include study abroad, further expanding youths' experience of the world beyond Talltown. Even if youth will eventually return to Talltown, dominant discourse frames their short-term leaving as beneficial for them and the community. It is ideal for the youth because it promises upward social and economic mobility. It is beneficial for the community because those of these youth who may eventually return, bring additional skills, knowledge, and experience, back to the community.

Increasingly, the types of jobs associated with middle-classness require a college education. "Good jobs" among Talltown emerging adults are first and foremost jobs that are well compensated, with at least enough to support oneself for now, and eventually usually a family. Such jobs require a college degree, or if not that, then hard physical labor. But jobs through which emerging adults embody middle-classness should also at least be enjoyable, if not the fulfillment of a personal calling. So even the "good job" requiring manual labor may no longer be sufficient for performing a middle-class status through work.

The norm of post-secondary education and training is of central importance to Settersten and Ray (2010) with their swimmers and treaders, and to a somewhat lesser degree, Carr and Kefalas (2009) with their achievers, seekers, and stayers. This emphasis on post-secondary education and training is deeply classed. Thus the issue of rural-youth out-migration, so clearly an issue of education and employment, is also a class issue. Talltown youth's "describable individuality" (Foucault 1997:91) is
deeply classed. "Going somewhere" and "getting stuck" are discursive themes by which Talltown youth are evaluated, and through which they negotiate status. These themes are especially upheld in the discourse of people who work with youth. Brad, a teacher in his late twenties who has one of Talltown's biggest "names," talks about these themes. For Brad, "going somewhere" is about acquiring knowledge, skills, or experience with which one can make a contribution to community, and "getting stuck" is about being "trouble."

"Going somewhere" and "getting stuck" are processual themes that nevertheless emphasize a particular end. These are terms of social assessment. They are discursive labels, which youth encounter through interactions with teachers, information provided by the county scholarship foundations, and the talk of parents, other community members, and the notoriety of former scholarship recipients. Through these labels, Talltown youth negotiate positions in local and larger fields. "Going somewhere" and "getting stuck" constitute the discursive social reality, the class-based hierarchy, with which Talltown youth are evaluated and within which they maneuver.

Talltown youth are assessed as "going somewhere" or "getting stuck," based on the myth of meritocracy, and the rules of privilege, which the myth preserves. Privilege, as embodied by the college-educated person, is said to be the result of hard work. A college education is an important cultural aspiration, but it is through hard work that one will be able to prepare for college, and succeed there and beyond. Adolescent preparation for college is said to be especially advanced in Talltown,
because of the small student to teacher ratios. Through the themes of "going somewhere" and "getting stuck" adolescents get the message that hard work is the only thing that stands between them and a college education, and following that, a rewarding and well compensated career. In reality there may be a lot that stands between an individual and this path into adulthood, especially class.

_Talltown Youth Awards_

The same strategic game, one of vying for position, with which Talltown negotiates position in a rapidly changing world, is also applied to Talltown youth. Symbolized at Fair and in school athletics, Talltown youth are put into a competitive discourse not unlike that into which they place their 4-H livestock. That the Talltown youth occupy different social positions is easy enough to hear in local discourse. Application of evaluative dimensions constitutes a hierarchical discourse about Talltown youth, one that is especially informed by the myth of meritocracy. I have chosen to use here, a set of five labels, based on what I understand to be the dominant emic view in Talltown, which acknowledges both the power of contemporary educational norms and of one's family background (i.e. class) in marking social position in Talltown.

The terminology of Grand Champion, First Place, Runner-Up, Participant, and Did Not Participate, recall that important community ritual, Fair, and the way in which Talltown youth are called to compete with one another there and in other ways. Youth that earn ribbons in such competitions are put into local discourse with positive status
positions in the local field, and perhaps in larger fields as well. The youth who, by contrast, Did Not Participate, are put into discourse with very low status terms. With this distinction, Talltown community discourse suggests that participation is nearly obligatory. Youth who do not earn ribbons are taken to be those who did not put forth the effort to compete. Participation is top priority in Talltown. There are, after all, only so many Grand Champion ribbons to go around. In this way the social distance between Grand Champions and Participants is not be as great as one might think. The distance between those who win ribbons and those who do not participate, however, is vast.

The stakes of competition are somewhat different for adolescents and emerging adults. Community discourse positions Talltown adolescents, even those "more mature" than their non-rural counterparts, as not yet adult. In other words, they are still in the process of becoming someone to whom more fixed statuses are applied. Hence adolescents are not generally thought of as having a social class, though their households of origin do. Adolescents are instead, thought to experience the social position of their family more than they do class itself. This kind of processual assessment of adolescents emphasizes the path they are on, judged largely through family background (i.e. class), youth and parent buy-in to the corporate authority of the educational institution, and the resultant path to adulthood, along which they are assumed to be heading.

Adolescents are primarily put into Talltown community discourse in processual terms, though there are some Talltown adolescent statuses, including some
imposed by adolescents themselves, and some applied by adults. Talltown adolescents themselves make use of such status distinctions as "athletes," "preppies," "cowboys," "goths," and "goodie-goodies." In making these distinctions they prepare themselves for the world of emerging adults, which they are shortly to enter, and within which they will have to vie for position. Adolescents are also ascribed certain statuses by adults, especially teachers, other professionals, and authority figures like school administrators and police. Through the discourse of such adults, adolescents may be assigned statuses, such as "learning disabled" or "high school dropout."

Emerging adults, meanwhile, are put into community discourse, primarily as adults, not as persons still under construction. Talltown emerging adults are discursively more adult than not. As such, they are not put into discourse by means of social processes, but in terms of more fixed statuses. Though they are often still undertaking the process that is the transition to adulthood, in particular its identity exploration component, emerging adults are not evaluated in processual terms, and are, instead, assessed in status terms. It is here, in emerging adulthood, that the when Talltown youth ribbons are awarded, all that came before were adolescent test runs.

The discursive themes of "troubled" and "trouble" youth provide good example of the difference in the way adolescent to emerging adult social positions are assessed. During adolescence, youth who are not invested in schooling, perhaps to the point of being oppositional and participating in risky or illegal behavior, are said to be "troubled." This label is a reflection of the belief that this "trouble" is caused by the adolescent's background, in either a broken home or a very low-income home. But
Once these adolescents reach emerging adulthood, they are no longer "troubled," but "trouble." They are no longer victims, but perpetrators. So it is that "troubled" and "trouble" show how processes lead to statuses and at what point the transition is complete.

In my choice of terminology, I emphasize both status and process in the Talltown youth social hierarchy. Settersten and Ray's (2010) swimmers and treaders are clearly processual terms. Stayer, achiever, and seeker, about which Carr and Kefalas (2009) write, are status largely status terms. But my goal is to arm community leaders and policymakers with knowledge about both the structural and agentive sides of the perceived problem of rural youth out-migration, and so my analysis incorporates both process and status.

My purpose of in using these labels to the Talltown youth social hierarchy is to draw attention to them, so that we may assess and critique the hierarchical system for what it is, a perpetuator of socially constructed difference. In the way the Talltown community operates now, youth are much like the 4-H projects they themselves bring to Fair. The community brings its youth, not to Fair, but to the world, to the fields beyond the local community, and there communities compete with each other in demonstrations of their ability to raise young people who will go on to be a socially and economically successful adults.

Placing all youth in a singularly competitive arena is like judging cattle against pigs, or sheep against chickens. The capital that individuals of different class backgrounds acquire and the fields to which they have access, are as distinct as wool
and feathers. Talltown community discourse nevertheless puts youth into this competitive ring because of the myth of meritocracy that claims that a college degree is the key to social and economic success, and it is achieved through hard work, especially hard work in preparation for and during college.

I use the terms Grand Champion, First Place, Runner-Up, Participant, and Did Not Participate, to draw attention to the social assessment of Talltown youth that is already taking place. My goal is not to reify this assessment, but to critique it and the persistent hierarchical difference of which it is a part. These are emic terms, though they are not the actual vocabulary of people I talked with; they elaborate on the emergent and discursive themes of "going somewhere" and "getting stuck." Though these terms are my own, I draw them from what I understand to be the dominant emic perspectives in Talltown community discourse.

Talltown Grand Champion youth are those that are assessed as successfully navigating local and larger fields of power through the strategic embodiment of certain dominant norms, such as college education, outdoor recreation, hard work, and community closeness and involvement. Grand Champions enact these norms with apparent ease. The Grand Champion status has an ascribed component, despite its emphasis on achievement. Grand champion adolescents, who might include Brandi, are often the sons and daughters of college-educated parents. They are often members of historically established and well-respected families, children of ranchers or successful small business owners, whose operations they may stand to inherit. As adolescents with "names," they receive lots of praise at school, perhaps including
additional attention or help when it is needed. They are star athletes and student council representatives. They get good grades, take honors classes, are university-bound, and receive county scholarships and the recognition that comes with them. They go to church, are active in its youth group and participate in 4-H. They are involved, have strong social networks, often incorporating lots of extended family. They also work hard in preparing for college. As emerging adults, Grand Champions, like Derek, go off to college and complete their degree program, trying out different places and people, areas of study and work, as they do so. And then, as the final rite in the acquisition their Grand Champion status, they, like Ann, choose to make their adult lives in Talltown, bringing with them all their skills, knowledge, and experience, which they apply to their work and life in Talltown.

First Place adolescents have several things in common with Grand Champions, particularly with regard to their orientation toward education and, eventually, professional employment. Their parents are also likely to be college-educated. First Place adolescents are also active extra curricular participants, though perhaps not in sports. They may or may not be 4-H participants. They also get good grades, take honors classes, and are university-bound. They are not likely to have much by way of extended family in the Talltown area, having come to the area following a parent's government employment, for instance, so they may not have the same large social networks that Grand Champions do, and they may or may not enjoy outdoor recreation. When First Place adolescents become emerging adults, they go off to college, often with a local scholarship and the recognition that entails, to earn their
degree. But while at college, they may find that the career they would like to pursue or the sort of place they would like to live, is not the place where they grew up. In this way First Place emerging adults navigate larger fields of power so well that they feel no particular pull to return to live in Talltown. First Place youth are a Talltown export. They do not reproduce the local community. There is, however, one small payoff for the rural community that produces First Place youth. Even though First Place youth are not a return on the community's investment as Grand Champions are, they nevertheless bolster the status of the Talltown community, by showing that it produces young people who make successful, i.e. middle-class, college-educated, and professional, transitions to adulthood.

If Grand Champion and First Place youths' primary strategic maneuvers are through educational institutions, Runners-Up primarily negotiate position outside the educational realm, primarily because their parents did not attend college and are not particularly oriented toward educational institutions. As a result, Runner-Up adolescents' orientation toward schooling is not particularly strong, though it is not necessarily oppositional, they would often just rather be outside hunting or fishing, or cowboying, or tinkering on a vehicle. Their parents may or may not put much emphasis on college, but are not likely to have gone themselves. Runner-Up adolescents do fine in school, though they do not take Honor's classes or get top grades. They are student athletes and enjoy what Talltown offers by way of outdoor recreation. They may also be "born and raised" in Talltown, with fairly large kinship and social networks. As adolescence wraps up and emerging adulthood looms,
Runners-Up may investigate post-secondary education and training opportunities, such as community college, vocational school, or the military. If they go to a vocational school, they may do so with one of the county scholarships and receive the local accolades that go with it. They may even attempt to undertake a university education, but are likely to find it financially, academically, or socially untenable, and either switch institutions, or come home to Talltown to work. Other Runners-Up proceed directly from high school into the local workforce, especially when they can get one of Talltown's "good jobs" that does not require a college degree. If they have experience working with cattle they might work for a rancher, or if they have experience working on any of the federal land management work crews, they might be able to get a job, if only seasonally, with one of these agencies again. Runners'-Up who do leave, either for post-secondary education or training, regardless of whether or not they are successful in this endeavor, and those who leave just for the experience of another place, eventually return. They, like Grand Champions, make their contribution to community in Talltown. They may return because they want to, but they may also return because they have to. They are like Lori, who has some college, and who has returned to Talltown where she and purchased, and now operates, a small business. Lori also has a wide social network via her large and historically established family, and has every intention of staying in Talltown. She is also very involved in the community, through numerous organizations. If she finishes her degree and if she can keep this business, or perhaps another, afloat, she might yet rank higher than Runner-Up.
Participant youth are from lower-income households and have, at most, a high school diploma. As adolescents they are not particularly invested in school, and not especially involved in extra curricular activities, though they may have an activity in which they do participate. Participant youth are not oriented toward, nor could they afford a university education, and neither could they easily afford other types of post-secondary education or training, though like Runners-Up, they may look into their options toward the end of high school. They might also find a way to undertake some kind of post-secondary program. In adolescence Participants are often put into discourse, especially by those who work with youth, as "at risk" of "getting stuck," because of their lack of interest in school, a lack of support at home, or because of their experimentation with alcohol or drugs. As emerging adults, Participants work hard to get by, like Beth, a high school dropout in her mid-twenties who pieces together full-time employment from multiple part-time jobs. The jobs that emerging adult Participants do are not particularly well compensated, nor are they likely to offer benefits. In short, they are not "good jobs," though Participants do manage to get by.

Lastly there are those youth who Did Not Participate. These are the youth who are put into discourse as essentially having removed themselves from the youth competitive ring. As adolescents they are not oriented toward schooling, instead taking an oppositional and confrontational attitude toward the idea of school and its authority figures. They do not participate in extra curricular activities or community organizations. They spend their free time in relatively isolated social groups of "outcasts," "loners," or "druggies," doing little other than "partying." They are more
than "at risk," they are "troubled." When emerging adulthood comes around, youth who Did Not Participate, may or may not have graduated high school. They are un- or under-employed and, as such, put into discourse through the theme of being "stuck in a rut," someone not making a meaningful contribution to community. In continuing their "partying" ways, youth who Did Not Participate are also put into discourse as "trouble," someone who is not only not contributing to the community, but actually bringing it down.

_Negotiating Position_

The Talltown youth hierarchy is a social structure, but it is not a singularly imposing objective social reality. It is, rather, a social reality with which Talltown youth negotiate position in ways that are situational, contextual, multiple, ongoing, forward looking, and strategic. The ranking youth are given on one occasion does not have to be their ranking forever. They can learn from their experiences and modify their strategies for the next time around. The Talltown youth hierarchy is a social reality, negotiated by creative agents, who are capable of (re)interpreting of norms in many different fields. And so examples of agency within the Talltown social reality are tremendously varied. But there are some noteworthy patterns, in particular among adolescents and emerging adults, and with regard to class, traditional gender roles, ethnicity, and sexuality.

In order to grasp the full complexity of Talltown youths’ strategic enactment of norms, it is best not to begin with an approach wherein structure is viewed primarily
as an imposing force. It is this, certainly, but this is not its primary quality, not what defines it. Structure is rather the ideological world in which subjects make their way. It is that within which they maneuver and strategize. Thus we can look at the ladder idea in the myth of meritocracy, and see that in a strictly theoretical and conceptual sense, it is not entirely inaccurate. Structures, like the ladder, are things with which people are meant to interact with, though the ladder may not be as user-friendly as people are led to believe. Structures constitute the fields in which subjects negotiate position. Their presence requires response. What we do might reinforce the existence and purpose of the ladder, but it might also resist it, rework it, or be resilient to it.

**Reworking**

Reworking is the agentive strategy wherein one alters the conditions of one's existence and makes a more tenable existence possible. The common thread in examples of reworking is that it is said to lead to the achievement of upward social and economic mobility. The prolonged transition to adulthood is a reworking strategy, which supports the pursuit of several others, including leaving home and going to college. Those who leave for college, and obtain a degree, alter the conditions of their existence by virtue of their expanded social and cultural and broader networks. Those who leave for college, but do not complete a degree, or who undertake some other form of post-secondary education or training, can also cultivate social and cultural capital, and expand their networks in order to similarly access more viable fields of practice.
Some examples of reworking are aimed not so much at upward social mobility, but otherwise at being able to pursue the lifestyle one chooses. Megan, for example, who has lived in Talltown since she was a pre-teen, and is now in her late twenties, reworked through marriage. She chose the life of a homemaker in a ranching family, and so bypassed college, though the man she married did earn a college degree. Jesse, a gay man who works in the arts and is in his early thirties, similarly utilized a reworking strategy, in his case moving, to a city where he could work and live freely. In both cases, the strategy employed achieved the desired end of a life that Megan and Jesse wanted to live.

Resilience

Resilience is seeing oneself differently, but not in such a way that alters the conditions of one's existence. Resilience is the strategy most closely associated with youth who are, compared to their peers who are "going somewhere," "getting stuck." It is more of a way to cope with changing, competitive, or otherwise stressful conditions in one's life, but not a way to change them. One example of this, is the way Talltown youth, especially adolescents, discursively position themselves in relations to each other, or in relation to youth of other places, in which they see themselves as more "mature," harder working, and more ready for the transition to adulthood.

The most common resilience strategy is the performance of a combination of roles, such as student and laborer. Resiliently embodying multiple roles one can symbolically hedge one's bets as to what skills and experiences will be most useful in
the future. Jose, a Hispanic cowboy in his late teens, does this. He has gained a lot of hands-on cowboy experience over the years, with which he could enter the workforce directly after high school, but he also talks about college. Jose's maintenance of both the student and the cowboy identity is strategic. The cowboy is a pathway to a locally valued status, which Jose can follow when others, especially that of the college student, turn out to be unavailable to him. Derek, who is in his mid-twenties, performs another combination of roles, that of college-educated professional and rancher. Derek is not altering the conditions of his existence in this way, but seeing himself in this particular way, as he awaits the time when he can leave his job and fully take over his family's ranch. Although both Jose and Derek resiliently perform a combination of roles, Derek's class position is higher than Jose's, as the former has already earned a college degree and stands to inherit a ranch, and both college and ranch ownership are likely to be out of reach for the latter. Yet they employ a similar strategy for coping with the uncertainty of the changing rural opportunity landscape.

Jose is particularly resilient in his side-stepping of ethnic Otherness. His cowboy identity is emphasized over all others, though this may (depending on what part of Mexico his family is from) be a strategic expression of resilience relating to that heritage, more so than it is a strategic resilience to Talltown social structure. Having lived in Talltown nearly all of his life, Jose very connected to and within Talltown, facts that may just raise the stakes of belonging a little higher. So perhaps when Jose resiliently performs the role of the cowboy, he is also strategically responding to his relative, if largely unspoken, ethnic Other status.
Another pattern of resilience that may be lurking just below the surface of discourse, involves seeing oneself as wise to the hierarchy in which one strategizes, though one does not talk openly against it. This is resilience enacted in the space between what people think and what they do. In this space Jose denies experiencing ethnic prejudice or discrimination in Talltown, and thereby affirms the norm of community closeness and asserts his belonging. The same can be said of the way others talk about Talltown's low-income residents. Even when people play the game and comply with norms about leaving socially constructed differences unmentioned, they may still see through the hierarchy, may even be able to explicitly talk about it, though she choose not to in order to achieve a strategic payoff.

Adolescent talk about college provides another example of resilience. Talltown adolescents have widely internalized the norm of college being the next step following high school. Even youth for whom it may not be possible, can talk in such a way as to align themselves with this norm. With very few exceptions, most Talltown adolescents I talked with said college was part of their future plans, so long as they can make it happen financially. But talking about college is different from going to college, let alone getting good grades and completing a degree program. Talk about college, as a middle-class emerging adulthood element, is a way to see oneself as participating in middle-class adolescence and emerging adulthood, at least until such time as the college degree has proven to be out of reach, financially or ideologically.
Resistance

When youth resist the conditions of their existence, they exploit the politics of agency and invoke positions that are explicitly oppositional. Outright resistance is rare in Talltown, as it is in the U.S. society at large. There are youth who challenge the hierarchy into which they are positioned, but, on balance, they seem to think that what they have going in Talltown, in particular, the lifestyle they are living, is not so bad that it needs to be resisted. Alternately, they may be thinking that the hierarchy and myth of meritocracy as so strong that they cannot be resisted. Then again, they may see through it only partly, and yet buy into the rest. Regardless, there are at least some youth see through the hierarchy and myth of meritocracy, at least in part. Thus when Carter, a youth who Did Not Participate, talks about college-bound youth, he refers to them as "spoiled."

As an adolescent Carter was very resistant to the authority of adults, and so is his younger brother, Chase, after him. They and others like them resist the norm of community involvement and the norm of participation, at least in so far as it requires that adolescents take a detour through the educational institution. Youth like Carter definitely value hard work and, through their cowboy experience characterize themselves as hard workers and so see through the myth of meritocracy. Perhaps youth like Carter are still re-defining themselves in accordance with the myth, just not redefining the myth or the hierarchy in their entirety. I think it is quite likely that Jose also sees through the myth and the hierarchy, but that he has made a choice to
strategically work this knowledge in order to affirm his belonging in Talltown. Carter, who is Caucasian, has apparently not felt compelled to do.

*Significance*

The theoretical and conceptual problem addressed in this dissertation is to account for both structure and agency, and to explain the relationship between them, in the perceived real world problem of rural youth out-migration. Where local and larger fields of power intersect is where local communities can vie for symbolic position, and demonstrate their worth. This intersection is particularly visible in the socialization of youth, who acquire, internalize, and embody norms of both local and larger fields. It is here that my work adds to theoretical and conceptual understanding. Although youth compete in a theoretically unified, though vastly interconnected, field of practice, the strategic avenues available to them yet differ because of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. My work specifically helps to fill gaps in the literature on youth and class, strategic identity, emerging adulthood, rural youth out-migration, and rural community. My work supports some of the findings of others in these areas, but critiques and expands upon others.

Willis (1977) and Hall and Jefferson (1991) have looked at the intersection of youth culture and class. Theirs was a rather inflexible approach with emphasis on the maintenance of cultural hegemony. Thus the youth sub-cultures they describe reflect the values of class-based parent cultures. My work supports such findings, but with some important differences. Youth reproduce values across class positions. Some
Talltown youth from working-class households embody an orientation away from educational institutions and toward work, especially work in ranching, and in so doing reproduce the norms of their class-based parent cultures. But others, while they embody an orientation toward work and ranching, also embody an orientation toward post-secondary education. In this way non middle-class youth can reproduce middle-class norms. In the embodying the norms of the cowboy, middle-class youth may even reproduce the norms of non middle-class youth.

In light of such class-straddling youth cultural practice, my work contributes to an understanding of the concepts of structure, agency, and resistance. Working and lower class youth, especially those whose parents did not obtain a college degree and have not particularly emphasized this path for their children, encounter the structuring force of class. Those who are nevertheless oriented toward educational institutions demonstrate agency, specifically in their strategic use of identity in ways that set them apart from their households of origin and their class-based parent culture. Youth may also demonstrate agency in their embodiment of local norms, which run counter to those dominant in the society at large, but which recreate the local community character. Through such cultural practice, Talltown youth reveal the range and limits of both structure and agency. They also show that agency is more than a product of social structure, and more than an expression of internalized and embodied norms. Distinct though projects may be, agency is multiple even to the point of being overlapping and contradictory. Certainly there is a degree to which youth internalize the sense of difference with which others see them, but they also have the capacity to
perform their culture in ways that can both reinforce and contradict their social positions in multiple fields. For both adolescents and emerging adults the question is not, therefore, how does their cultural practice reflect structure or agency, but how is their cultural practice a strategic reflection of structure and agency.

Arnett (2004) portrays emerging adulthood as a recently emergent and drawn out phase of life, which is characterized by intense identity exploration through the changing parent-child relationship, in sex, love, and potentially marriage, through college, and at work. My findings suggest two additional contexts for emerging adult identity exploration: among friends and at play. It also explores how emerging adult identity exploration is limited by class and place. In rural communities like Talltown, where there are no local colleges or universities, emerging adults must "go away to college" if they are to pursue identity exploration in this way. It is here that class and place become particularly limiting with regard to identity exploration. To "go away to college" requires not only financial means, but also academic skills, which emerging adults of working and lower class backgrounds may not possess. And yet these rural emerging adults do undertake identity exploration in those areas that are available to them, particularly at work, at play, in relationships with friends and romantic partners. The flexible nature of the part-time work high school dropouts and high school graduates are likely to get, is actually fairly well suited for the work-related identity exploration characteristic of emerging adulthood, as Beth's story shows. Identity exploration through dating might be especially productive these days, with the influx of men from in town to work on the pipeline project. Even in times of lesser dating
options, who one chooses to engage romantically can be strategic, such as in Megan's case, where she married into a successful ranching family. This is, moreover, one of the few paths that women have access to which men do not.

My work also adds to Arnett's (2004) with the idea that the category of emerging adulthood ought to extend clear through the twenties, even into the thirties. This is necessary not only to be inclusive of the rural emerging adult experience, but also to allow for the effects of recent economic recession, which have made employment less certain and caused some people to delay undertaking certain markers of the transition to adulthood, in particular marriage and parenthood. The mid-thirties are also a more accurate point of demarcation for the normative age at which people have fully exited the processual social life of adolescence and emerging adulthood and entered firmly into the status-driven realm of adulthood. The distinctly processual assessments of adolescents and status-based assessments of emerging adults is yet another area in which my work complicates the work of Arnett (2004).

Settersten and Ray (2010) write about emerging adults and discuss why a prolonged transition to adulthood is positive for both individuals and society. In doing so they draw from a rather simple analytical framework, featuring *swimmers*, those of at least middle-class status who are on a path of upward social mobility, identifiable in Talltown as those who are "going somewhere," and *treaders*, those of working or lower class status who are simply struggling to get by, known in Talltown as those who are "stuck." My work again reveals that the reality of emerging adulthood is more complex. Despite widespread preference for a four-year university education,
there are many lanes from which a swimmer might choose, identifiable by type and timing of post-secondary education or training undertaken. My work in Talltown also suggests that in addition to swimming and treading, there is another important trajectory in the transition to adulthood. In Talltown those following this trajectory are known as "trouble" though they could perhaps also be seen as sinkers. Moreover, these trajectories are not infallible. In the current economic climate some simmers might end up treading, and some treaders might end up sinking.

Settersten and Ray's (2010) labels are process labels. The labels Carr and Kefalas (2009) use are status labels. The part-process, part-status, terms that I use to describe the Talltown youth hierarchies and draw attention to how youth come to be in this competitive field in the first place, unlike Settersten and Ray (2010) and Carr and Kefalas (2009), who start from the position that youth are simply in this competitive field. These authors do not so much inquire as to how this is culturally accomplished, though they do account for structural factors. My focus on both structure and agency, and how they relate through the Talltown youth hierarchy, gets at how Talltown youth are put into competitive discourse, what the consequences of this may be, and how people maneuver within this discourse in ongoing actions.

Carr and Kefalas (2009) paint a somewhat more complex picture of the different paths into adulthood, and they do so in the context of a rural community. They identify achievers and seekers, both of which leave the rural community though following different paths, and stayers, who do not leave the rural community
following high school and consequently do not pursue post-secondary education or training.

My work finds that there is yet more variation within the paths about which Carr and Kefalas (2009) write. This variation is especially consequential regarding the assessment of youth by the rural community. Some *achievers*, for example, though they set out in pursuit of a college degree, do not complete it, which suggests a forfeiture of *achiever* status, at least until such time as the degree is completed. There is considerably more variation among *seekers*. Some will pursue post-secondary education through a community college, others will pursue training through a vocational or technical program, still others a military career, perhaps with some post-secondary education thereafter. Some *seekers* will be unsuccessful in these pursuits, thus losing their *seeker* status and acquiring a *boomerang* status, which Carr and Kefalas (2009) note. But what becomes of the *seekers* who are successful in these pursuits?

My findings suggest that ascribed local status differences persist even when *seekers* (Carr and Kefalas 2009) are successful in their post-secondary programs. The privileged position of those with a four-year university degree still wins out. Even among *stayers*, things are more complex than they might seem. My work shows that within this group there are two important subdivisions. There are those who are "stuck" and those who are "trouble." There are also important variations along lines of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, particularly within the local field, for which Carr and Kefalas (2009) do not account. Among women, for example, it is more acceptable to
make a more traditional transition to adulthood, involving early marriage and parenthood, so long as the woman is married to a man that does acquire some form of post-secondary education or training.

Lastly my work adds to the understanding of rural communities in the US today. My work confirms the findings of Power and Barrett (2001) with regard to the rise of the post-industrial economy in the New American West, despite the continued importance of natural resource and agricultural sectors in local community cultures. In particular, my work brings out how changes that rural communities face, play out in adolescent and emerging adult sub-cultures. It also brings to light certain alternative, even contradictory ways that rural make use of rural hierarchy. My work confirms the findings of Corbett (2007) that education in rural communities primarily functions to provide youth with some means of leaving. It also confirms the findings of Flora and Flora (2008) regarding the types of capital that are plentiful and scarce in the context of rural restructuring. My work takes these findings yet further and shows how the local rural field overlaps and interacts with larger fields of practice, particularly through the idea of meritocracy and how these ideas are then imposed upon rural youth, through the elders and institutions of the rural community. This is highly consequential in the way that it shifts local understanding of the meaning of community. If once rural people understood their communities to be place-based, today they are based on shared interpretations and measures of success. It is this emergent understanding of community which allows for persistent rural class difference, even as it is disguised by the perceived problem of youth out-migration. It
is with the power of community, as in a sense of shared identity that is largely class-based, and reinforced by the myth of meritocracy, that socially constructed differences persist in places like Talltown.
Conclusion

This dissertation concludes that the root of the rural youth out-migration problem is one of persistent class difference, perpetuated and obfuscated by the myth of meritocracy. It finds that Talltown youth are disciplined by this myth and internalize its messages, especially that which says hierarchies are climbable, and that inequality is explained as the result of differences in innate capabilities and willingness to work hard. Having internalized these messages and in response to the changing rural landscape of opportunity, youth make decisions about where and how to make their future lives. Despite what is suggested in the myth of meritocracy about an open U.S. society, some strategic pathways are still differently available to different people. I suggest that the pathways of upward social and economic mobility, that singular supposedly climbable ladder, is actually more like a hillside covered in different trails. The experiences of youth are too diverse to expect that any one pathway should be deemed best by all, let alone available to all. In response, youth strategically organize themselves in relation to the hierarchy, maneuvering as best they can along available pathways that are place-, gender-, and class-specific, and also crosscut by ethnicity and sexual orientation. In this multi-dimensional field of practice, youth take up and set aside various identities and roles through embodiment of dominant and counter norms of the local and larger fields. Using the themes of "going somewhere" and "getting stuck," this dissertation has sought to make visible and critique the hierarchical system with which class and other forms of socially
constructed difference persist.

*Individuals, Families, Communities, Nation*

The out-migration of rural youth is often very positive for youth themselves, as it helps them to rework their lives with the hope of achieving some upward social and economic mobility. It symbolizes the success culmination of the hard work of the youth in their studies and of the parents in launching their children into adulthood. Out-migration can also be a negative for youth, as when they find it difficult to maintain the relationships they once had with family.

Rural youth out-migration has both positive and negative consequences for communities. On the negative side, if large numbers of youth are leaving and not returning, communities face aging populations and a shrinking tax base. On the positive side, it can be taken as evidence that a community raises young people who are set up to make successful transitions into adulthood. There is another positive for communities, especially for individuals who are particularly socially connected there. The lack of youth returning allows influential people to go largely unchallenged in their influence. Having a small community suits some people just fine, especially their feeling of connectedness that might be jeopardized if lots of young people started coming back.

The consequences of rural youth out-migration for the nation are ambiguous. On the one hand, rural youth out-migration demonstrates the high educational attainment of citizens. This is beneficial, at least up until a point in economic recession wherein
people find they are overeducated and underemployed. On the other hand, rural youth out-migration contributes to a tendency to invest in places that are not losing youth, places that already have access to much capital and many fields in which to use it. Thus the problems of uneven development are perpetuated. In setting up a national social distinction between those who are and are not socially and economically successful, based on individual effort, our nation's version of meritocracy perpetuates the "radical mode of economic Darwinism and unfettered free-market values" (Giroux 2009:2), also known as global neoliberalism. A "combination of market fundamentalism, greed, and cutthroat, individual competition" with an "unparalleled degree of social inequality" has resulted in "massive dislocations in the basic foundations of the larger society" (Giroux 2009:2). Rural youth out-migration is but one symptom of this much broader problem.

*Getting (Back?) to the Place Where I Belong*

The paths youth take along the transition to adulthood, and the way they strategize upon them are varied and nuanced, despite having internalized the dominant norms of the middle-class, which privileges particular paths and strategies. Youth who experience the advantages of being at least middle-class tend to feel a great sense of belonging in their communities of origin. Generally speaking this carries over from childhood, through adolescence and emerging adulthood. In isolated rural communities, however, as youth reach emerging adulthood their sense of belonging is diminished somewhat because of structural constraints in the area of employment. It
is here, especially, that some youth switch from a position of great belonging in community to one of eagerness to get out of the community.

Of course some youth experience this eagerness to leave even before emerging adulthood. Although there are some who have long felt out of place in their community of origin and have a strong desire to leave, if they are of a working- or lower-class background, they may not have the resources with which to make that move. These youth often do not perceive much belonging or acceptance in their communities of origin, but they often have nowhere else to go.

Among those able to leave their community of origin following high school, some stay away and some return. Among those who stay away, some may wish to return to their hometown, but find they have no opportunity to do so, usually because the job they seek is not available there. The rest of those who stay away have no desire to go back home, having found a greater sense of belonging in a place other than Talltown.

Certainly some youth do desire to return someday to their community of origin, and will do so if able. For some, this depends on a job opportunity presenting itself. Others may try to create their own opportunity. But even these youth might not want to return right after college, wanting to make the most of their emerging and early adulthood where there are more people to meet, jobs to try out, and consumer entertainment options. Generally speaking, these youth are more ready to return to their communities of origin when they have or are ready to start families of their own. Whenever or however they eventually come back, it is youth of this kind, those who
are typically college educated and then find a way to return, that are most valued in their rural communities.

_A Problem of Rural Youth Out-Migration?_

By the numbers, Talltown may not have a youth out-migration problem, at least not so long as new people come in. To be sure, Talltown does acquire new residents from time to time. Most recently there has been a population influx due to the natural gas pipeline project, but these are workers who will move on to the next project when this one is complete. Other families have come in following work at the prison and more may do so for the biomass plant. Still others come to Talltown to retire or in search of the apparently more affordable housing that rural places are thought to offer. This does not mean that the trends in Talltown transitions to adulthood, most visible in patterns of youth out-migration, do not point to some other problem. In fact they do. They indicate a class problem, one that is disguised, yet persistent. Perhaps in childhood, certainly beginning in adolescence, and quite clearly in emerging adulthood, some youth are more valued and more invested in than others.

_The Myth of Meritocracy_

The problem with meritocracy wherever it plays out, is that social position protects the advantage of some, but precludes others from having similar advantages. This affects Talltown youths' ideas about place and belonging, and reinforces the experience of belonging and acceptance among privileged youth, while restricting the
belonging of less privileged youth. If there is to be any hope of problematizing or critiquing this hierarchy or of understanding why youth strategize in the ways that they do, we need to understand the hierarchy of privilege for what it is. The hierarchical discourse in which youth strategize is abstract, tacit, multiple, and subject to change, but it is nevertheless real. As people experience it they make sense of it and maneuver within it, and they do so differently in adolescence and emerging adulthood, according to their class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This is discourse and ideology made socially real. Just as people are put into discourse the discourse itself is put into reality by the simple act of engaging in it. Its durability is due to the fact that it is so tied in with the neoliberal and meritocratic assumptions of our time. It is a socio-cultural truth that is hard to pin down, for which it is hard to find an origin, a source, yet it is seemingly everywhere, and reinforced especially by institutions that control capital.

Recommendations

There are a number of things rural communities could do to address what they have perceived as a youth out-migration problem. First, they must recognize that out-migration problem is at root a problem of class difference. They should manage their expectations, especially in the context of recession. Rural communities today, particularly those that are rather geographically isolated and "off the beaten path," probably ought not to expect to retain their middle-class college-bound youth. So long as college education is seen as vital to social and economic success, and so long as
rural communities do not offer post-secondary opportunities, youth who want to pursue college will leave.

In addition to managing expectations at the community-level it is important to manage expectations about local youth. The myth of meritocracy is, ironically, deeply entrenched in rural community discourse. Whatever might be said popularly, not all local youth are "above average," and not all of them need to go to college. This reassessment of the necessity and accessibility of a college education is something that needs to be reevaluated nationally, but particularly in rural communities that lose many of their youth. Doing so will help rural communities to better assess themselves, and see that they are not idyllic and separate, but very much a part of the larger society. In seeing themselves as different from the rest of society, and yet internalizing the myth of meritocracy, rural communities create their own sets of problematic contradictions of class, which are hoisted unevenly upon some of their youth.

Rural communities also need to become conscious of their passive disaffirmations of youth who are not on the college path. Otherwise they will continue to overlook opportunities to invest in these youth. Rural communities' passive disaffirmations of their non college-bound is untenable for two reasons. Firstly, such disaffirmation encourages non-college bound youth to invest in the idea of meritocracy even though they are not likely to see a return on such investment or may well acquiesce to defeat and end up "stuck." Secondly, such disaffirmation stands in the way of rural community development by blinding policymakers to as yet un-
pursued opportunities to invest in youth who stay. When rural community leaders talk about wanting to bring jobs to their communities, they are not simply talking about "good jobs," they are dreaming big about "great jobs" for professionals. Here again, rural communities should be realistic in their expectations. An influx of "great jobs" may not be better than an influx of "good jobs," particularly not when what a community has a surplus of non-college educated workers.

Rural communities should also encourage investment in local labor and sustainable industries. They should especially invest in the youth who not undertake post-secondary training and, instead, stay in Talltown. In particular, they should petition school boards and state and federal departments of education and lobby for a more open high school curriculum. Bureaucratic requirements that a certain number of years of particular core subjects must be taken need to be reassessed. At present youth are limited in their opportunity to pursue a vocational track, particularly since there is a county scholarship available for just such an education. The scholarships are available for vocational training, but youth do not have enough opportunity to explore this track while still in high school. Educational institutions are powerful influences, even for those who are not college bound. As curricular changes are made slowly, teachers and guidance counselors in particular, ought to provide encouragement for vocational training. This might include talking to students earlier on about vocational opportunities, helping them access internships and apprenticeships, or, just showing respect for those who are not college bound by speaking respectfully about them, and about what they contribute to the local community. Such encouragement should not
stop at the school, however. Community organizations, such as the Rotary Club, could also recognize emerging adults who stay and work hard in their jobs, thus reinforcing for those who are soon to be emerging adults that the vocational track is viable and valuable.

Talltown, like many other rural communities today, is weighing the pros and cons and assessing the opportunity for development of green industries. In the interest of creating a variety of jobs that are sustainable and available to people across skill levels and educational backgrounds, I recommend that communities continue to do so, particularly regarding renewable energy, particularly because this could be construed as a community-level strategy that is pursued specifically to benefit youth who stay. Understandably, rural community leaders may be wary of investing too much in any particular development strategy. The restructuring of economies and communities in the recent past has made them somewhat hesitant in this regard. But a bet on renewable or otherwise green energy is perhaps one of the best investments a community can make. The U.S. is a huge consumer of energy, with no indication that U.S. lifestyles are going to drastically change any time soon. Meanwhile, conventional energy sources like coal and petroleum are polluting and finite.

Particularly now, in an era of economic crisis, non college-bound youth need attention, support, and encouragement. They are already doing what they can to get by and conform to the expectations of local and larger fields, but they simply do not have enough options, at present, for doing so. Supporting these youth means creating new paths to adulthood, or validating alternative paths that already exist. It means
providing a range of strategies, appropriate to different paths, for youth to follow in school and in local communities. Perhaps most importantly, it means giving youth on these paths their due respect. Communities should be aware of the myth of meritocracy and the associated hierarchy with which they currently assess youth, and within which youth practice their culture and find social positions. They should also be aware of how what they say and what they do, when seen and heard by local youth, constitute messages of belonging and the passage of judgment. If they do, they might finally see the rural youth out-migration problem for what it is, a problem of persistent class difference.
References


Davidson, K. and R. Ladkani. dir. 2006. *The Devil’s Miner*. DVD.


Appendices
Appendix A Photovoice Focus Group Question Guide

Original Guide

(SHOWED)

What do you **see** here?

What is really **happening**?,

How does this relate to **our** lives?

Why does this problem or strength exist?

What can we **do** about it?

Revised Guide

Tell me about your favorite photo and why it's your favorite.

(Ask the next two questions for each of the three photographic themes.)

When you were taking pictures for the theme of ____________, what was most important for you to convey?

Thinking about all the photos you took on the theme of ____________, what is the one main point or idea that I should take away from them?

Are there other points you wanted to make/things you wanted to convey with the pictures that we haven't touched on?
Appendix B Interview Guides

For Adults Working with Youth

Interview Objective: to understand what meanings adults who work with youth associate with rural youth who do and do not leave the community they grew up in following high school.

First I’d like to get some basic demographic information from you.

How old are you?

If you were filling out an official form of some kind, what box or boxes would you check for your race/ethnicity?

Tell me about the education you have obtained to date.

What socioeconomic class would you say you belong to: lower, middle or upper?

Would you say that you were lower, middle or upper __________?

Did your parents go to college?

What do/did they do for a living today?

How long have you lived in this area?

Do you have extended family here?

If so, when did your family arrive in the area?

Thinking about your experience in school, were you involved in any extra curricular activities through your school or other organizations?

Like what?

Thinking about what came after high school for you, what did you plan to do or consider?

4-year college?

Community college?

Vocational school?

Military?

Get a job right away?

Something else?

Now I’d like to talk a bit about your experiences in Talltown.

If grew up in the area:
What about this community did you like growing up here?  
What about this community did you dislike growing up here?

If grew up elsewhere: 
Tell me a bit about how your experience living in Talltown today is like/unlike your experience growing up. 
What do you like about living in Talltown today? 
Are there other things you like? 
What do you dislike about it? 
Are there other things you dislike?

What do you like about living in Talltown today? 
Are there other things you like? 
What do you dislike about it? 
Are there other things you dislike?

Have you ever considered leaving Talltown? 
What are some of the reasons you might leave or stay? 
If you did leave, would you consider coming back? 
What would it take to bring you back, if you left?

I'd like to talk now about your role working with youth and your impressions of youth here.

In what capacity do you work with community youth? 
How much of your time is spent in direct contact with youth? 
What are your primary goals of your work? 
Personally? 
For the organization you work for? 
What challenges do you face in your work?

In general, what opportunities or advantages are there for youth from here? (In education? In employment? Socially?) 
Growing up? 
As adults?

In general, what are some of the challenges youth from this community face? (In education? In employment? Socially?) 
Growing up here? 
As adults? 
How do you think youth cope with these challenges? 
What sort of help is available to youth in coping with these challenges?
Tell me about your impressions of youth that go to college.
  What kinds of kids were they growing up?
  What are their futures like?
  Do you sense any trends in what these youth go on to study?
  What do those youth who leave have that those who stay lack?

Now tell me about your impressions of youth (what they were like growing up, what their futures are like) that don't go to college?
  Those that go to vocational school?
  Those that enter the local workforce directly?
  Those that leave, but not for college?
  Those that go into the military?
  What do those youth who stay here have that those who leave lack?

How else might youths' experiences growing up differ?
  By socio-economic class?
  By race/ethnicity?
  Any other ways?

What, in your opinion, marks the transition into adulthood?
  For young people in general?
  For young people in this community?

Now I'd like to ask you about your impressions of different kinds of places.

If someone from an urban area, who had never been to a rural place, asked you what rural living was like, what would you tell them?
  What else would you tell them?

What is your interpretation of what urban life is like?
  Anything else come to mind?

What is your impression of what suburban places are like?
  Anything else?

What would you say is your ideal kind of place?
  What is it like?

Is there anything else that you think I should know about this community?
  About youth in general or about youth here?

Lastly, there's another part of my research called Photovoice. That's where a group of local high school seniors will be taking pictures in the community (on the themes of youth life, community assets, and community challenges) and then doing a focus
group with me to discuss them. The final piece to the Photovoice part of my research is for those pictures that prompted a lot or especially poignant discussion to be displayed publically (with permission of those photographed of course) in order to promote community discussion on these issues of importance to youth. I plan to put together a poster to give to the school for display, but it would be ideal if we could also display these images elsewhere in the community, like maybe at Fair or in an empty storefront window.
Can you think of any ways you might be able to help me and the seniors with that?

For Junior/Middle or High School Age Youth

*Interview Objective: to understand what meanings rural youth associate with remaining in or leaving the rural community they grew up in following high school.*

First I'd like to get some basic demographic information from you.
How old are you?

What grade are you in?

If you were filling out an official form of some kind, what box or boxes would you check for your race/ethnicity?

What socioeconomic class would you say you belong to: lower, middle or upper?

Would you say that you were lower, middle or upper __________________?

Did your parents go to college?

What do they do for a living today?

How long have you lived in this area?

Do you live in town?

If not, how far out do you live?

Who do you live with?

Do you have extended family in the area?

If so, when did your family arrive in the area?

Now I'd like to talk a bit about what it's like for you living here.

Do you like living in Talltown?

What are some of the things you like about it?

Are there other things?

What are some of the things you dislike about it?

Are there other things?

If you have lived elsewhere, what are some of the things you liked/disliked about that place?

Do you like school?

What do you/don't you like about it?

Are you involved in any extra curricular activities?

Like what?

Is that through the school?

Are you involved in any groups or activities outside of school?

Like a church?

Tell me about your social life here in Talltown.

Do most of your friends live here?

What do and your friends like to do for fun?
What else do you do?
What’s your impression of the dating scene here?
For people your own age?
For people older than you?

What are the different social groups in your school?
What are some of the names people use for different groups or types of people at your school? (Jocks? Nerds? Etc.)
What about people that don’t fit into those categories?
What do you call them?
How do you know who is in what group?
What things do people in those groups share?
When did you realize what group you belonged to?
How did you know?

Do many of the people at your school drink alcohol for fun?
What do you think of that?
Is that something that a lot of people do, or just a few?
Do you know of any consequences for people that have been caught drinking alcohol?

Do you think the Talltown youth experience is any different for people who are relatively new to the town compared to those who come from families that have been here a long time?
If so, how?
How else might youths' experiences of growing up here differ?
By socio-economic class?
By race/ethnicity?
For those who are really into school and extra curricular activities?
For those who are not?
Any other ways?
How do you think the Talltown youth experience is like the experience of youth in other places?
How do you think the Talltown youth experience is unlike the experience of youth in other places?

Now I'd like to talk about your future plans.

What do you plan to do after high school?
4-year college?
If college, what kind of college do you want to go to?
What do you imagine the people at such a school would be like?
Community college?
Vocational school?
Military?
Get a job right away?
Something else?
And where do you imagine you might live in the future?
What would you like about that place?
Do you want to get married?
Where do you think you will meet your spouse?
Do you want to have kids someday?
Where would you like to raise them here or somewhere else?
Why?
What kind of work do you imagine in your future?
What would you like most about that kind of work?
How did you/will you become qualified for that kind of work?
Where do you think that will take place?
Do you want to live in Talltown at any point in the future?
What are some of the reasons you would or would not?
What would it take for you to change your mind?
What do you think is the impact of Talltown young people moving away after high school?
How does this affect them?
How does this affect the community?
How will you know when you are an adult?
Will you and your classmates reach adulthood at the same time?
Will you and your classmates reach adulthood in the same ways?
Now I want to talk about your impressions of different kinds of places.
If someone from an urban area, who had never been to a rural place, asked you what rural living was like, what would you tell them?
What else would you tell them?
How would you say it was different from urban places?
How would you say it is similar to urban places?
Different from suburban places?
Similar to suburban places?
Can you describe for me what your ideal vision of a community is?
What is the setting like?
How big is it?
What are the people like?
What kind of jobs are there?
What do people do for fun there?

Lastly, is there anything else that you think I should know about this community? About youth in general or about youth here?

For Youth Who Are Living in the Talltown Area After High School

*Interview Objective: To understand what meanings these people associate with leaving the rural community they grew up in and what meanings they associate with leaving and returning.*

First I'd like to get some basic demographic information from you.

How old are you?
If you were filling out an official form of some kind, what box or boxes would you check for your race/ethnicity?

Tell me about the education you have obtained to date.  
   Have you ever thought about continuing your education?  
      What might you study?  
      Where might you study?

What socioeconomic class would you say you belong to: lower, middle or upper?  
   Would you say that you were lower, middle or upper __________?

Did your parents go to college?  
   What do/did they do for a living?

How long have you lived in this area?  
   Do you have extended family here?  
      If so, when did your family arrive in the area?

Thinking about what came after high school for you, what did you plan to do or consider?  
   4-year college?  
   Community college?  
   Vocational school?  
   Military?  
   Get a job right away?  
   Something else?

What do you do for work?  
   Did you do any jobs prior to this one?  
   What kind of work would you like to do in your future?  
      What would you like most about that kind of work?  
   How did you/will you become qualified for that kind of work?  
      Where do you think that will take place?

Are you married?  
   Where did you meet your spouse?  
   Do you want to be married someday?  
      Where do you envision meeting your spouse?  
   What’s your impression of the dating scene here?

Do you have kids?  
   Do you want to have kids someday?  
      Where would you want to raise them?
Are there things you would want for your children that relate to living here?
Are there things you would want for your children that relate to living somewhere else?

Now I'd like to talk a bit about your experiences in Talltown and your plans for the future.

If you grew up in this area, what do you remember most about that experience?
  What did you like about it?
  What did you dislike?

Did you like school?
  What did you like/dislike about it?
  Were you involved in any extra curricular activities through your school or other organizations (like a church)?
    Like what?
  Are you involved in any non-work/non-family activities or groups today?

How would you describe the crowd you hung out with growing up?
  What other social groups were you aware of?
    How did you identify them?
  What was the dating scene like when you were in school?
  What did you and your friends like to do in your free time?
  Did you know many people that drank alcohol while before they were of legal age?
    What did you think of that?

Do many of the people you grew up with live in the area?
  Did many of them go to college?
  Did many of them leave at all and then come back?

Have you ever lived anywhere besides Talltown?
  Where?
    For how long?
  What brought you there?
  What brought you back?

Are there ever times when you consider leaving Talltown?
  What are some of the reasons you might leave?
    If you ever left Talltown, would you ever come back to live?

Did your parents grow up in this area?
  What have they told you about their childhood here?
What else have they told you?
   Do you sense that these were things they wanted for you?
Do you think people expected certain things of you growing up because of your family?
   Like what?
   Is that still the case today?
   What is expected now?

What are some of the things you like about living in Talltown today?
   Are there other things you like about it?
What are some things you dislike about it?
   Are there other things you dislike about it?

Tell me about your social life here in Talltown today.
   What do you and your friends like to do for fun?
   What else do you do?

How do you think the Talltown youth experience is like the experience of youth in other places?
   How do you think the Talltown youth experience is unlike the experience of youth in other places?

Do you think the Talltown youth experience is different for people who are from families that are relatively new to the town compared to those who come from families that have been here a long time?
   How so?
For people from relatively wealthy people compared to relatively less wealthy?
   How so?
For people from of different races/ethnicities?
   How so?
Do you think the Talltown youth experience is different for people who are really into school and extra curricular activities?
   For people you aren't really into those things?
   Any other ways?

Do you see a difference between the people you grew up with who stayed here after high school and those who left?
   How are their lives different or similar?
   How are they different as people?

What, in your opinion, marks the transition into adulthood?
   For young people in general? For young people in this community?
What do you think is the impact of Talltown young people moving away after high school?
   How does this affect them?
   How does this affect the community?

Now I'd like to talk about your impressions of different kinds of places.

   What is your interpretation of what urban life is like?
      Anything else come to mind?
   What is your impression suburban places?

If someone from an urban area, who had never been to a rural place, asked you what rural living was like, what would you tell them?
   What else would you tell them?
      How would you say it was different from urban places?
      How would you say it is similar to urban places?

   What would you say is your ideal kind of place?
      What is it like?

Lastly, is there anything else that you think I should know about this community?
   About youth in general or about youth here?

For Youth Who Moved Away From the Talltown Area After High School But Have Since Come Back OR For Youth Who Did Not Grow Up in Talltown Area, But Have Since Moved to the Area

*Interview Objective: to understand what it meant for these people to leave the rural community they grew up in following high school and what it meant for them to return to it.*

First I'd like to get some basic demographic information from you.

   How old are you?

   If you were filling out an official form of some kind, what box or boxes would you check for your race/ethnicity?
Tell me about the education you have obtained to date.
Have you ever thought about continuing your education?
What might you study?
Where might you study?

What socioeconomic class would you say you belong to: lower, middle or upper?
Would you say that you were lower, middle or upper __________?

Did your parents go to college?
What do/did they do for a living?

How long have you lived in this area?
Do you have extended family here?
If so, when did your family arrive in the area?

Thinking about what came after high school for you, what did you plan to do or consider?
4-year college?
Community college?
Vocational school?
Military?
Get a job right away?
Something else?

What do you do for work?
Did you do any jobs prior to this one?
What kind of work would you like to do in your future?
What would you like most about that kind of work?
How did you/will you become qualified for that kind of work?
Where do you think that will take place?

Are you married?
If so, where did you meet your spouse?
If not, do you want to be married someday?
Where do you envision meeting your spouse?

Do you have kids?
Do you want to have kids someday?
Where would you want to raise them?
Are there things you would want for your children that relate to living here?
Are there things you would want for your children that relate to living somewhere else?

Now I'd like to talk a bit about your experiences in Talltown and your plans for the future.

Who do you live with currently?
Do you live in town?
If not, how far out do you live?

If you grew up here:
What motivated you to leave Talltown after high school?
Where did you go?
What did you do while you were away?
Jobs?
School?
Socially/for fun?
How long were you gone?
What brought you back?
How was it reintegrating into the community?
Do many of the people you grew up with live in the area?
What was it like growing up in Talltown?
What did you like most about growing up here?
What did you like least?

Did your parents grow up in this area?
What have they told you about their childhood?
What else have they told you about it?
Do you sense that these were things they wanted for you?
Do you think people expected certain things of you growing up because of your family?
Like what?
Is that still the case today?
What is expected now?

If you did not grow up here, what do you remember most about that experience?
What did you like about it?
What did you dislike?

Did you like school growing up?
What did you like/dislike about it?
Were you involved in any extra curricular activities through your school or other organizations (like a church)?
Like what?
Are you involved in any non-work/non-family activities or groups today?

How would you describe the crowd you hung out with growing up?
What other social groups were you aware of?
How did you identify them?
What was the dating scene like when you were in school?
What did you and your friends like to do in your free time?
Did you know many people that drank alcohol while before they were of legal age?
What did you think of that?

How would you say your experience of community and place growing up is like your experience in Talltown today?
How are those experiences different?

What are some of the things you like about living in Talltown today?
Anything else?
What are some of the things you dislike about it?
Anything else?

Tell me about your social life today in Talltown.
What do and your friends like to do for fun?
What else do you do?
What’s your impression of the dating scene here?
What about the social scene more generally?
What do people do for fun here?
Do you ever consider leaving Talltown?
What are some of the reasons you might leave?
If you ever left Talltown, would you ever come back?

How do you think the Talltown youth experience is like the experience of youth in other places?
Pre and post high school?
How do you think the Talltown youth experience is unlike the experience of youth in other places?
Pre and post high school?

Do you think the Talltown youth experience is different for people who are from families that are relatively new to the town compared to those who come from families that have been here a long time?
How so?
For people from relatively wealthy people compared to relatively less wealthy?
  How so?
For people from of different races/ethnicities?
  How so?
Do you think the Talltown youth experience is different for people who are really into school and extra curricular activities?
  For people you aren't really into those things?
Any other ways?
Do you see a difference between the people you grew up with who stayed here after high school and those who left?
  How are their lives different or similar?
  How are they different as people?

What, in your opinion, marks the transition into adulthood?
  For young people in general? For young people in this community?

What do you think is the impact of Talltown young people moving away after high school?
  How does this affect them?
  How does this affect the community?

Now I'd like to talk about your impressions of different kinds of places.

What is your interpretation of what urban life is like?
  Anything else come to mind?
What is your impression suburban places?

If someone from an urban area, who had never been to a rural place, asked you what rural living was like, what would you tell them?
  What else would you tell them?
    How would you say it was different from urban places?
    How would you say it is similar to urban places?

What would you say is your ideal kind of place?
  What is it like?

Lastly, is there anything else that you think I should know about this community?
  About youth in general or about youth here?
For Youth Who Left Talltown After High School And Have Not Returned

Interview Objective: to understand what it meant for these people to leave the rural community they grew up following high school and what it means for them to continue to reside elsewhere.

First I'd like to get some basic demographic information from you.

How old are you?

If you were filling out an official form of some kind, what box or boxes would you check for your race/ethnicity?

Tell me about the education you have obtained to date.

Have you ever thought about continuing your education?

What might you study?

Where might you study?
What socioeconomic class would you say you belong to: lower, middle or upper?
   Would you say that you were lower, middle or upper __________?

Did your parents go to college?
   What do/did they do for a living?

How long did you lived in the Talltown area?
   Do you have extended family there?
      If so, when did your family arrive in the area?

Thinking about what came after high school for you, what did you plan to do or consider?
   4-year college?
   Community college?
   Vocational school?
   Military?
   Get a job right away?
   Something else?

What do you do for work?
   Did you do any jobs prior to this one?
   What kind of work would you like to do in your future?
      What would you like most about that kind of work?
      How did you/will you become qualified for that kind of work?
      Where do you think that will take place?

Are you married?
   If so, where did you meet your spouse?
   If not, do you want to be married someday?
      Where do you envision meeting your spouse?

Do you have kids?
   Do you want to have kids someday?
      Where would you want to raise them?
         Are there things you would want for your children that relate to living here?
         Are there things you would want for your children that relate to living somewhere else?

Where do you live now?
   Who do you live with currently?
   How did you come to live in that place?
What are some things you like about it? 
What are some things you dislike about it?

Now I'd like to talk a bit about your experiences in Talltown and your plans for the future.

What motivated you to leave Talltown after high school? 
Where did you go? 
Why did you go there? 
What did you do while you were away? 
Jobs? 
School? 
Socially/for fun? 
How long have you been away? 
Is there anything that might bring you back to the Talltown area? 
How do you think it would be reintegrating into the community? 
Would that experience be different from someone moving to the Talltown area for the first time? 
How so?

How long did you live in the Talltown area? 
In what phase of your life was that?

Do you still have family in the Talltown area? 
A lot/little? 
Are you close?

Do many of the people you grew up with still live in the area? 
The majority? Or a few? 
What are the lives of those who have stayed in the Talltown area like?

Did your parents grow up in the Talltown area? 
What have they told you about their childhood? 
What else have they told you about it? 
Do you sense that these were things they wanted for you? 
Do you think people expected certain things of you growing up because of your family? 
Like what? 
Is that still the case today? 
What is expected now?

Did you like school growing up?
What did you like/dislike about it?
Were you involved in any extra curricular activities through your school or other organizations (like a church)?
Like what?
Are you involved in any non-work/non-family activities or groups today?

How would you describe the crowd you hung out with growing up?
What other social groups were you aware of?
How did you identify them?
What was the dating scene like when you were in school?
What did you and your friends like to do in your free time?
Did you know many people that drank alcohol while before they were of legal age?
What did you think of that?

How would you say your experience of community and place growing up is like your experience in Talltown today?
How are those experiences different?

What are some of the things you like about living where you live today?
Anything else?
What are some of the things you dislike about it?
Anything else?

Tell me about your social life today.
What do and your friends like to do for fun?
What else do you do?
How is this like/unlike what you would do for fun if you still lived in Talltown?
What’s your impression of the dating scene where you live today?
How is this like/unlike the dating scene in Talltown?

Do you ever/would you ever consider returning to Talltown to live?
Why/why not?
If so, what might compel you to return?
When might that happen?

How do you think the Talltown youth experience is like the experience of youth in other places?
Pre and post high school?
How do you think the Talltown youth experience is unlike the experience of youth in other places?
Pre and post high school?
Do you think the Talltown youth experience is different for people who are from families that are relatively new to the town compared to those who come from families that have been here a long time?
   How so?
   For people from relatively wealthy people compared to relatively less wealthy?
      How so?
   For people from of different races/ethnicities?
      How so?
   Do you think the Talltown youth experience is different for people who are really into school and extra curricular activities?
      For people you aren't really into those things?
      Any other ways?
   Do you see a difference between the people you grew up with who stayed here after high school and those who left?
      How are their lives different or similar?
      How are they different as people?

What, in your opinion, marks the transition into adulthood?
   For young people in general?
   For young people in this community?

What do you think is the impact of Talltown young people moving away after high school?
   How does this affect them?
   How does this affect the community?

Now I'd like to talk about your impressions of different kinds of places.

What is your interpretation of what urban life is like?
   Anything else come to mind?
What is your impression suburban places?

If someone from an urban area, who had never been to a rural place, asked you what rural living was like, what would you tell them?
   What else would you tell them?
      How would you say it was different from urban places?
      How would you say it is similar to urban places?

What would you say is your ideal kind of place?
   What is it like?

Lastly, is there anything else that you think I should know about this community?
   About youth in general or about youth here?