'At Risk' of Being Rural? The Experience of Rural Youth in a Risk Society

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Abstract

This paper uses data from a researcher-designed longitudinal survey of youth to examine factors associated with whether rural youth return to or stay in their home communities or a similar rural community. It discusses the effects of this decision to be a young adult in a rural community. A qualitative analysis expands the more quantitative one in order to document how rural youth articulate what it means to be rural in relation to educational and/or career choices. Drawing on risk-society discourse and study, the paper argues that what remains largely hidden to date is that the features of the risk society, including greater uncertainty, fragmentation of and increasingly individualized life-course transition processes, have mostly ignored the fact that rural youth remain at greater comparative risk than their urban counterparts. Our analysis suggests that, despite feeling satisfied with their personal and family life and despite seeing home and family as important, many rural youth now frame their rurality and their choice to live in their home communities as failures, either in relation to education and/or to occupation and career. In the absence of systemic solutions to mitigate and address the risks of staying home for rural youth, many individuals, we find, embody socioeconomic problems as an inability to "get very far." They often see themselves as having few options. Our findings suggest that more attention is needed on what it is about our ideas of modernity and urban mobility, evidenced in notions of the risk society, which leads so many rural youth to leave their home communities, or to be dissatisfied with their opportunities if they opt to stay.

Key words: rural youth, risk, life-course transitions, education, mobility

1.0 Introduction

Studies of rural youth focusing on their experiences and understandings about living in or returning to their home communities largely remain invisible in Canada and beyond, as do the many reasons they may leave. Although recent scholarship on rural youth has begun to gain some momentum (see Gauthier, 2001), we still do not know a great deal about the push and pull factors associated with rural outcomes around life-course transitions, partly because discussions particular to rural experiences are absent from most considerations of public and educational

policy (Corbett, 2006, 2007).[1] Previous analyses of our data suggest that rural youth are more likely to leave home, more likely to leave at an early age, more likely to want to return, more likely to have close ties to the community, and more likely to find adjustment to city life difficult (MacKinnon & Looker, 1998). In this paper, we expand on these findings by considering youth who stay in or return to rural communities, what factors may predict whether they stay/return, and the effects of this decision for a young adult in a rural community. We also highlight how the rural youth themselves express both positive and negative attitudes and understandings of being rural within an increasingly risk-based society (Beck, 1992, 1994, 1998).

Within a dominant discourse around how to succeed, which equates success with urban locales, lifestyles, migration, and employment (Florida, 2002), we focus on youth who have not left their communities and, who by their own understanding, view their rurality in complex and often contradictory ways that are both positive and negative, a finding echoed by Glendinning, Nuttal, Hendry, Kloep, and Wood (2003). To this end, we argue that within an increasingly global and *risk-based society* (Beck, 1992) rural youth's experiences remain undertheorized and understudied, particularly in relation to urban youth experiences. What remains largely hidden to date is that the features of the risk society, including greater uncertainty and fragmentation of and increasingly individualized life-course transition processes, have mostly ignored the fact that rural youth remain at greater comparative risk than their urban counterparts. While those theorizing around the risk society (Bauman, 1992; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) continue to emphasize the *urge for mobility* as a feature of modern life, our paper seeks to highlight the rural experiences of risk and mobility, particularly for those who "risk" returning or staying in their home communities or in rural communities similar to those in which they grew up. While we suggest that there are often added risks for rural youth staying in their home communities, we also consider how this rurality[2] is understood by rural youth themselves in relation to the structural features of the risk society. These understandings contrast with risk theories that suggest that the

> places we occupy are no more than temporary situations … [where] progress in life is measured and marked by moving homes and offices … and [where] [n]othing seems to be 'for life,' and none of the things in life are approached and embraced and cherished as if they were. (Bauman, 1992, pp. 695–6)

2.0 Youth and the Risk Society

According to theorists of the risk society, socioeconomic changes globally signal "the end of nature and the end of tradition" (Beck, 1998, p. 10) in a society that is

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[1] Gauthier (2001) notes that few studies attempt to understand Canadian youth as a whole and that the longitudinal approach employed by Looker, Andres, Anisef, Krahn, and Thiessen (2001) has no counterpart in French Canada. She also notes that French research may not be circulated as fully as it deserves. Despite Canada's being a bilingual country, too often the dissemination of research findings remains unilingual.

[2] Following Pratt (1996), we use the term *rurality* reflectively and contextually, noting that *rural* is often used in a way that orients one to essentialist divisions between localities. See also Corbett (2006).

"increasingly preoccupied with the future" (Giddens, 1998, p. 27). While we do not agree with a totalizing and uniform conception of risk (for a critique, see Dean, 1999), the literature around risk as a feature of modern society aptly describes a general shift in society whereby traditional notions of fate and chance, often defined locally, seem to have given way to a more intense consideration of *calculations* about achievement. These considerations and calculations undoubtedly take place within a broader societal context where the features of so-called success are "lifted out" of their once local boundaries (Giddens, 1991). In practical terms, if we consider that access to postsecondary education is now assumed to be a necessary step for youth (HRSDC, 1998) and that many rural youth must necessarily leave their home community to acquire postsecondary education, then we begin to get a glimpse of what these new calculations around one's life-course demand for rural youth. As Mythen noted (2005), "The risk society thesis echoes the anxieties and insecurities which many people express about their employment experiences"[3] (p. 143).

Given the conditions of late modernity, then, where the traditional and structural elements (class, gender, location) of society are thought to have become less deterministic, few would disagree that within the last 30 years conditions have placed a greater demand for and an increasing emphasis on formal education in Canada, as elsewhere in the developed (and developing) parts of the world (Thiessen & Looker, 2007). In addition, as Lehman (2004) observed, when the concept of the risk society is applied to the domain of school–work transitions, the suggestion is that the pathways for youth are riskier and now more individualized, fragmented, and uncertain than was previously the case. At the same time, youth adopt strategies and tactics to have a say regarding their entry into adult life (see Gauthier, 2001). These conditions, as risk theorists would suggest, therefore include a greater engagement on behalf of students and families through domains such as education and employment. In order to ensure success today, "people have to take a more active and risk-infused orientation to their relationships and involvements" (Giddens, 1998, p. 28). At an individual level, young people must consequently engage "in a reflexive confrontation with the likely consequences of their choices and actions" (Lehman, 2004, p. 380). In this sense, young people are seen to have a more active orientation to their lives (Giddens, 1998) since individual responsibility is replacing collective assurance against risk. Beck (1994) conceptualized individuals as "self-critical actors" constantly in pursuit of an active self-construction through their personal biographies: "Individuals must produce, state and cobble together their biographies for themselves" (p. 13).

Accordingly, Kelly (2001) argued that the processes of individualization evidenced in notions of the risk society have particular implications for youth. He commented that risk societies "visit new forms of responsibility and individualization on young people and their families to prudently manage individual 'reflexive biographical projects' in increasingly uncertain settings"[4] (p. 23). He noted further that

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[3] Mythen, however, argues that risk-society theorizing has significant limitations, arguing that many facets of Beck's risk thesis remain stratified along previous constructs such as class; part of the goal of this paper is to add nuance to risk-society theorizing by taking the concept into rural and urban differences and providing empirical data to what is too often a universalized concept that is also often too blunt a tool.

[4] Rose (1999) characterizes these new forms of responsibility as emerging facets of economic citizenship, or neoliberal rationalities, asking citizens to actively partake in their self-advancement, "in the name of maximizing the entrepreneurial comportment of the individual" (p. 340).

discourses of youth are framed by the idea that the period of youth should be a transition from "normal" childhood to "normal" adulthood. Simultaneously, as Gauthier (2003) noted,

> an unforeseen consequence of the democratization of education is that we find ourselves faced with the need to reach a certain standard vis-à-vis the complicated link between scholastic environments and the world of employment. It creates problems of access for those who have trouble conforming to it, and allows others to surpass it with greater ease. (p. 87)

That these discourses and standards subsume rural youth into so-called normal transitions and access is problematic, both from an educational (Corbett, 2007, 2006) and a work transitions standpoint (Gauthier, 2001, 2003). As evidenced in the experiences of rural youth who remain rooted firmly in their local communities, these decisions may be at the expense of participation in the active and self-advancement mobility seemingly required for success in modernity discourse (i.e., the risk society).

2.1 Exploring the Margins: Rural Youth and Risk?

> "It's pretty rough around here. Now in the city I would imagine there'd be a whole lot more possibilities. I mean, it's pretty easy. There's a lot more things, there's a lot more accessibility.... There's just a lot more possibilities for job employment and all that stuff than around here, which would be the thing. But then I'd have to move." (rural informant, 2001)

Within the overarching discourse and study around the risk society, *risk* is either explicitly or tacitly conceptualized as an urban phenomenon. Postmodern theorists such as Bauman (1992) describe a world where nomads "wander between unconnected places" (p. 693). In this vision of the risk society, the necessity for mobility characterizes the social, where individuals must constantly construct and reconstruct their identity in the face of a global and cultural celebration of consumption, emphasizing individualistic lifestyle choice and mobility, which is understood to undermine any lingering attachments to locality (Castells, 2004; Jamieson, 2000). As our informant above succinctly noted, to participate, she would have had to move.

Economist Richard Florida (2002, 2009), for example, locates economic development and place precisely in urban centres' ability to attract and retain creativity, based on the emergence of a highly educated and mobile creative class. While admittedly evocative, Bauman's and others descriptions of modernity colour the discourse around the risk society and tend to privilege an urbanized understanding of risk, including risk for youth. In a society characterized by uncertainty and danger, where risks are no longer localized and community specific (Green, Mitchell, & Bunton, 2000), actions that seek to mitigate those dangers associated with risk are typically, then, assumed to be urban. This mirrors a more general trend in youth studies where young people are typically associated with urban issues (Matthews, 2000, cited in Meek, 2008), as Florida's (2009) latest

book title frankly asks, *Who's Your City? How the Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life.*

The assumption generally is that mobility, reflexive identity, and the active self, features of the risk society, are associated with strategies to succeed in an urban and modern world. Furlong and Cartmel (1997), for instance, commented that "young people today have to negotiate a set of risks which were largely unknown to their parents" (p. 1). This includes less certainty around labour markets and an increased demand for education and an educated labour force, which we would add means attendance at a postsecondary institution, often a university. Furlong and Cartmel (2003), in an attempt to update a theoretical model through which transitional outcomes can be explained, further noted that all "effective mobilization of capacities (which is central to smooth transitions) operates within a set of external constraints and tends to involve both resources and personal agency" (p. 149). They commented that a deficit in either of these two dimensions increases the risk of "negative outcomes."

Our study adds important nuances to this conceptual field of risk-society theorizing and rural research by demonstrating that youth's experiences are broadly subsumed under an encompassing discourse that *assumes* rural youth will react accordingly to the structural features of the risk society brought to bear on their individual life-courses. In short, *rural* has become framed as a potential *deficit*,[5] both subjective and structural, within the current political and policy climate that governs our understandings of smooth transitions. That rural youth themselves come to articulate these assumptions, often using the language of modern success and its taken-for-granted features (i.e., mobility, education, calculation around life-course, and the active self), critically confounds efforts to curb youth out-migration from rural areas, now a central concern of government at all levels (Looker, 2001; Malatest, 2002). At the same time, many rural youth remain embedded in their home or similar communities, struggling with the challenges of being rural: seasonal work, little access to public transportation, limited formal support structures, and restricted educational and training opportunities.

As we will see, our analyses suggest that many rural youth frame their rurality and their choice to live in their home communities as a failure, either in relation to education and/or an occupation and career.[6] That is, their choice to remain in their home community, at least in part, becomes refashioned as a failure to successfully "move away," to achieve "the good life," to "have it made," to "get [their] schooling," and in some cases simply to find "something to do," despite the fact that this is their choice, one they feel is, in other ways, warranted (rural informants, 2001). This so-called failure is effectively produced in relation to a broader discourse that assumes the solutions to the risks of a global socioeconomic landscape are to be found in one's response to the risk society, where individuals are bound to assume the role of makers of their "own livelihood mediated by the market as well as their biographical planning and organization" (Beck, 1992, as

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[5] We use this word intentionally in the pejorative sense as a means to critically investigate taken-for-granted assumptions of normal, responsible, or reasonable pathways for rural youth.
[6] It is important to note that many rural youth in Northern Canada have to leave home to attend high school, creating risks for them that can have tragic results, as their parental and communal ties are not present; six First-Nations youth attending a high school in Thunder Bay have died in less than a decade: http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/. Despite the growing strategic importance of the North, we know little about youth transitions in these regions (but see Looker, 2010; Looker et al., 2006).

cited in Kelly, 2001, p. 26). In our own data set one of our rural female informants noted the unique challenges of starting her own business in her rural community and sought help from another business owner:

> "We talked about there not really being enough work to go around to
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> support another hairdresser in the town; she told me the men travel about
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> 30 minutes … so that they can go to a barbershop instead of a hairdresser."
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> (rural informant, 1994)

Our study argues that these types of risks remain differentiated and underaccounted for regarding rural youth in comparison to urban youth, in both theoretical terms (i.e., risk-society theorizing) and in practical terms (i.e., education and public policy).

Our argument here is that since the risk of being rural is neither well recognized nor well understood, the experiences of rural youth and their available responses to risk are subsumed under what amounts to an urban response to risk—simply pick up and leave. In short, "ones who want more for themselves" (rural informant, 1989) and/or are "more interested in their education and their future" (rural informant, 1989) are the ones who leave and do not return (Looker, 1993). As another rural informant stated (1989), "*Rural area* here often means don't do what you want to." At the local level, and again in the words of one of our 17-year-old informants, the primary concern growing up in a rural area is how to get "a ticket out of [t]here." In another large telephone survey of rural youth (Malatest, 2002, p. 9), only 23% of youth reported that they thought their community afforded them an opportunity to make a good living, while even fewer reported it afforded them an opportunity to pursue postsecondary education (19%).

To document the risks associated with being rural, this paper presents quantitative and qualitative analyses of information from a longitudinal survey of Canadian youth. After describing the sample and data collection we will first examine what factors are related to whether rural youth will return to or stay in rural communities into their late 20s. Then we will consider the effects of this mobility pattern for these young people. We will explore how young adults in rural areas perceive and describe their situation, in order to document their views of the risk of being rural. While reported migration patterns paint a complicated picture of rural in-migration exceeding out-migration—resulting in what some optimistically term a "rural brain gain" (see Rothwell et al., 2002)—such a conclusion is somewhat misleading upon closer inspection. For instance, we would argue that there are very real short-term costs to rural youth out-migration that are not necessarily covered or matched by net-migration patterns over the long term. This includes reduced consumer spending, reduced supply of entry-level workers (Malatest, 2002), and as our qualitative data suggest (see also Malatest, 2002), lack of entrepreneurial opportunity. Additionally, we know that recruitment and retention of young people is essential to socioeconomic viability of rural communities. Yet, as Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette (2002) concluded,

> if a substantial portion of leavers were to return to their community, one
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> could count on return migration as a means of maintaining the size of a
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> given cohort in a community. The numbers presented in the paper indicate

that such a hope is not justified. At most 25% of leavers return to their

rural community ten years later. (p. 27)

Secondly, we note that migration patterns vary widely both between provinces and within regions of provinces. More importantly, statistics demonstrate that the rural and small-town population has mostly grown due to retirement destination communities and/or communities found on the edge of the commuting zones of larger urban centres (Mendelson & Bollman, 1998). That is, major cities are influencing growth of the mostly small-town populations at the edge of their commuting zone.[7]

Finally, loosely following Gauthier (2001), we agree that *youth* is in part a socially constructed category. How we think about and understand rural youth, and how they understand themselves, is an important avenue of research that provides nuance and context to quantitative patterns of migration. Our study takes seriously the notion that rural youth can tell us a great deal about how they understand their rurality and, by extension, their life-chances.

3.0 Data and Methods

The data reported in this paper are from a longitudinal survey of youth undertaken in Hamilton, Ontario; Halifax, Nova Scotia; and rural Nova Scotia.[8] The Hamilton subsample was included to allow comparisons with an earlier survey in that city. Halifax was included to provide an urban Nova Scotia subsample. The rural Nova Scotia sample was chosen as a purposive sample, to be representative of rural and small towns in that province. Names of young people born in 1971 were obtained from school records. As best they could, schools provided names of youths still in school and those no longer in school, born in 1971, who were in the school's catchment area.

The first data collection took place in 1989, when the youth were 17 turning 18 years of age. Almost all were still in high school at this stage. (Only 3 individuals were pursuing postsecondary education at the time of the survey. An additional 6% were no longer in high school.) Intensive, structured interviews lasting 1.5 to 2 hours each were undertaken with the youth, and questionnaires were given to both parents. The sample was designed so there would be about 400 participants in each of the three locales. The final *N* was 1,209 respondents.

Youth who participated in the 1989 interview were sent a short, one-page survey in 1992 and a more detailed one in 1994. In 1994 over 400 respondents were also interviewed. Finally, in 2000–2001, the respondents (then turning 29 years of age)

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[7] As Dupuy et al. (2000) observe, rural areas in British Columbia have shown net gains of individuals aged 15–29 of about 15% during the 1991–1996 period. At the same time, rural areas have faced serious problems in Newfoundland, where on average they have experienced net losses of their youth population of close to 15%. Rural areas in the Atlantic provinces, in Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have experienced more moderate losses of their youth population. In Quebec and Ontario, net changes in the rural youth population have been close to zero; Alberta has enjoyed moderate net gains in its population aged 15–29. Dupuy et al. (2000) suggest that youth out-migration from rural areas is likely tied to interprovincial differences in unemployment, an observation that does not bode well for predominantly rural areas outside those in Ontario, British Columbia, or Alberta.

were sent a detailed survey.[9] In 2000–2001 in-depth, unstructured interviews were also undertaken with 28 respondents. The quantitative analyses for this paper are drawn primarily from the survey undertaken in 1989 (background and high school data) and the 2000–2001 follow-up survey. The data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), using mostly cross-tabulations and logistic regression. Qualitative quotes are drawn from (1) the youth responses to the open-ended questions in the 1989 survey, (2) the interviews undertaken in 1994, and (3) from the in-depth interviews undertaken in 2000–2001. The date after the direct quotes indicates which of these three sources was used, where relevant.

3.1 Measures

The main focus of this paper is on youth who were living in a rural area in 1989. At times they are compared to the urban respondents. The first part of the paper looks at which of these rural young people are again or still in rural areas at the time of the last data collection. Some will have never left, some will have returned to a rural setting. Note that they may not be in the same[10] rural community as they were in 1989. Indeed only 45% of those in rural areas at the beginning and end of the study were in exactly the same community. However, others would be in the same region (another 23% are in the same county at the time of the two data collections). So, our analysis will examine the variables at time 1 that predict whether or not youth from rural areas are living in any rural community 11 years later.

Based on where they were living in 1989 and 2000–2001 we classify the respondents into four categories: rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural, and urban-to-urban. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the respondents for whom we have residency information in the two time periods.

Table 1. *Mobility Pattern of Sampled Population, 1989–2001*

Mobility category	Percent
Rural to rural	23%
Rural to urban	16%
Urban to rural	6%
Urban to urban	56%
N	705

Given that only 6% of the whole sample moved from an urban to a rural area and given our focus on rural youth, for much of the analysis we consider only the two groups who started in a rural area. One effect of this decision is to reduce an

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[9] Intensive effort was put into tracing respondents so that the response rates were kept as high as possible. Data were obtained from 731 individuals in 2000–2001, 60% of the original 1,209 respondents. The case base for particular analyses is further reduced by lack of response to specific items, or by a focus on a subgroup (such as those who were rural in 1989). The authors recognize that this sample attrition is not random. However, it is beyond the scope of the current paper to analyze or correct for the attrition in any systematic way.

[10] Separate small rural communities can be closer than two areas within a city, so the definition of whether one is in the "same" place becomes a complex one.

already compromised case base to an *N* of 274. In light of this reduced case base we will rely less on statistical significance than on patterns in the data in some of our discussions.

A number of statements about their communities were presented to the young study participants in 1989. They were asked to indicate if they agreed or disagreed with the different statements.[11] Five statements (one reversed so that a high number meant the same thing in all measures) were combined to form an attachment-to-community score (Cronbach's alpha = .78). These items were as follows:

- The area where I live is a good place to raise children.
- If you have problems you can count on folks around here to help out.
- I get a lot of respect from folks around here.
- I'd be a lot happier living somewhere else than here (reversed).
- Even if I leave this area, I'm coming back someday.

We also explore the young person's attitudes to life, particularly the extent to which they did or did not seem to embrace notions of independence and initiative, or whether they were more fatalistic in their approach to life. The measure of fatalism we use combines information from two agree/disagree items: *good luck is more important than hard work for success* and *people who accept their condition are usually happier than those who try to change things.* The more they agreed with these two statements, the more fatalistic they were considered to be.

The second part of the analysis focuses on comparing those with these different mobility patterns in terms of other outcomes: their satisfaction with various components of their lives, their educational attainment, and their occupational and work situation. This analysis allows us to get some insight into the effects of a youth's staying in or returning to a rural community. The quotes document how the youth feel about their situation.

One outcome measure required some substantive recoding. We asked the youth to report their current annual income (at age 29), using 15 preset categories, starting from 1 = no income, 2 = Can$5,000 or less, with subsequent categories in $5,000 increments up to $39,999, and then in $10,000 increments to 15 = $90,000 or more. These were recoded to the median dollar value so that a numeric value in dollar amounts could be calculated for the multivariate analyses. The highest category was recoded to $100,000. Virtually everyone who responded to this question gave an income; less than 1% reported no income.

We also collected data from parents, who were given questionnaires at the time of the original interview, when the youth were 17 years old. From these we have details of the parents' education, their income, whether they and their parents grew up in their current community, and their attitudes (including a parallel measure of parental fatalism).

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[11] The actual categories were *strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree,* and *strongly disagree,* on a Likert scale.

4.0 Data Analysis

4.1 Predicting Mobility

The first step is identifying the factors that are related to whether or not rural youth remain in a rural area. We know that certain factors are related to rural origins, so it is important to identify those so that we can control their effects. In this data set, there are more females among the rural respondents (58% versus 41% males), while the urban sample is divided fairly evenly by gender (data not shown). We know from other research that rural youth tend to have lower educational expectations than urban, and this is the case here as well. When we asked participants where they saw themselves living one year from that time, one rural respondent (1994) noted, in his home community "definitely" but then cautioned, "not too definite; I could see one thing … like if I see something else I want to take education-wise, maybe that would cause me to change [where I live]." Rural youth are keenly aware that education will typically require them to leave their home community (Corbett, 2007). We asked study participants what they wished they had done differently during their high school years. One rural respondent (1994) who had not moved on to higher education noted, "If I could do it again I would rather go to another high school, apply myself, get the grades, and further my education and move out of Liverpool."

As seen in Table 2, rural youth were more likely than urban (19% versus 9%) to say they expected no more than a high school education. On the other hand, urban youth were more likely to say they expected to get some university (64% versus 51% of rural youth).

Table 2. *Educational Expectations in 1989 by 1989 Location (N = 1,161)*

1989 expectations	Rural in 1989	Urban in 1989
High school or less	19%	9%
Nonuniversity	29%	27%
University	51%	64%

As one might expect, rural youth also reported closer ties to their community (see Table 3). More of the rural youth (15% versus 11% of urban) had a high score on the attachment-to-community measure. More urban participants (39% compared to 34% of rural) reported a low score on this scale.

Table 3. *Ties to Community in 1989 by 1989 Location (N = 1,190)*

Ties to community 1989	Rural in 1989	Urban in 1989
High	15%	11%
Medium	51%	49%
Low	34%	39%

Echoing findings of a 2002 study of rural youth and their perceptions of their home communities, many rural youth reported that "urban communities provid[ed]

considerably more post-secondary education opportunities, career opportunities and better access to sports/recreation events" (Malatest, 2002, p. 12).

To identify which factors affected whether the original rural respondents were in a rural area 11 years later, we use the measure of mobility, described above. The comparisons that are relevant to the focus of this paper are those comparing the rural-to-rural respondents with the rural-to-urban ones (see Table 4). (Note that these mobility patterns rely exclusively on measures of where the youth were during the first and last data collections. We do not have detailed information on their mobility between these times. So, some rural-to-rural youth may have spent some time in urban areas.) It is important to keep in mind that for much of the remaining analyses, the tables represent the responses of those youth who were *living in a rural community* at the time of the original data collection.

Table 4. *Cross-tabulations of Background and Attitude Factors Related to Mobility Patterns for Rural Youth*

Background and attitude factors	Rural to rural	Rural to urban
Gender		
Female	63%	37%
Male	51%	49%
1989 ed. expectations		
High school or less	64%	36%
Nonuniversity	73%	27%
University	46%	54%
Parental education		
High school or less	59%	41%
Nonuniversity	56%	44%
University	48%	52%
Attachment to community		
High	70%	30%
Medium	54%	46%
Low	58%	42%
Fatalism		
High	91%	10%
Medium	64%	37%
Low	50%	50%

Gender had an impact on mobility from rural areas. Even among rural youth (i.e., controlling for the fact that more females participated in the survey in rural areas), males were more likely to have moved to an urban area (49% versus 37% of females). Further, as we see from Table 4, rural youth who in 1989 expected a

university education were more likely (54% versus 36% of those expecting high school and 27% of those expecting nonuniversity) to have moved to an urban area. Those expecting to pursue nonuniversity postsecondary education were more likely than either of the other two groups to be in a rural area at age 29. Similarly, parental education was related to the mobility of these rural youth, although the differences were not as large as for the youth's own educational plans. Nevertheless, it is clear that those whose parents had a university education were more likely than others (52% versus 44% and 41%) to be living in an urban area 11 years later.

Attachment to community, which varies by the youth's origin (as shown in Table 3), is also related to where they were living in 2001. The two rural subsamples revealed that youth with high attachment to their community in 1989 were more likely be in a rural area in 2001 (70% compared to 54% and 58% of those with medium and low attachment).

Finally, we examined a number of items relating to the rural youth's attitudes. One that is related to their mobility outcomes is their degree of fatalism—their belief in luck and in accepting things as they are. Table 4 shows that those who were more fatalistic were more likely to be in a rural area at age 29. This result ties in with the discussion of modernity as involving a shift from notions of fate and chance to calculated individualism. These results suggest that rural youth who opted to live in rural areas as young adults did not articulate their lives in a way consistent with this notion of modernity, a tentative conclusion our qualitative data strongly support.

We performed a logistic regression using these potential predictive factors and found that only a few maintained their effects, after controls.

Table 5. *Logistic Regression Predicting 1989 Rural Respondents Who Are in Rural Areas in 2000–2001*

Predictor variables	Exp(B) (odds ratio)	Sig.
Constant	30.84	.001
Female	1.80	.05
Fatalism	0.53	.001
Parental education	0.86	.01
Nagelkerke's R^2	.14	

Table 5 shows only the variables that have statistically significant relationships with rural location in 2001. We see that being female continued to have an impact on living in a rural area 11 years after the first data collection. This is interesting because pursuing a university degree tends to draw youth away from rural areas and we know from other research that females are more likely to pursue this form of postsecondary education. The effect of parental education is also seen in the

odds ratios[12] reported in Table 5: Those whose parents had higher education were less likely to be in a rural area.

The impact of fatalism is interesting, keeping in mind that a low score indicates high levels of fatalism. The idea that young people who leave rural communities want to improve their situation echoes the descriptions given by rural youth in 1989 when they were asked who left and who stayed in the community (Looker, 1993). Many of them described those who stayed as not necessarily those who were lazy but those with close ties to the community. Nevertheless, rural youth who viewed their situations as the product of luck rather than effort were more likely to live in a rural area at the time of the last data collection. Those who said they disagreed with this notion of luck were less likely to have stayed and more likely to have moved to an urban area.

Surprisingly, our measure of ties to one's community had no effect when controlling for gender, parental education, and fatalism. The youth's own educational expectations no longer had an effect once parental education was included, presumably because the two were so highly correlated.[13] Neither did other measures that we considered but which were not reported in any detail in this paper, including: length of time in the community and whether one's parents and grandparents had grown up there; parental income; parental attitudes of fatalism; religiosity; youth attitudes to school; high school marks; and plans to leave as of age 17. These were explored as possible predictors, but it was clear they had no direct effects when the variables reported in Table 5 were included in the regression.

What are we to make of these results? We would argue that these patterns tell us not that these community ties are irrelevant but that they are filtered through the rural youth's educational expectations, which in turn reflect parental education. That is, those who want to stay may well understand that advanced education, particularly university, will take them away. It will take them away not only during the time they are pursuing their studies but also for the foreseeable future, given the paucity of jobs in rural areas that require a university degree. Who stays? According to a female rural informant (1989), "ones that are just looking for a job, like in the woods and that don't plan on anything much."

The results relating to fatalism clearly warrant further exploration. In other analyses (not shown) an attempt was made to identify factors that predicted these attitudes on the part of youth. The only measures that were consistently related to fatalism were aspects of the youth's schooling, especially how much they liked school and what marks they made in school. It was difficult to untangle which came first—was it that youth decided not to go on to further education, therefore disengaging from school, and as a result became fatalistic or was it that they were fatalistic (for reasons not decipherable from these data) and therefore gave up on

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[12] It was important to note that the measure of being female is a 0/1 dichotomy. The other measures are multiple-category measures so the odds ratios indicate the odds based on a change in one unit of that measure on the outcome (which is living in a rural area in 2000–2001, coded as a 0/1 dichotomy). Fatalism is a 5-point scale, with 5 being *strongly disagree*; parental education goes from a low of 12 (for high school or less) to a high of 21 for a postgraduate degree.

[13] It was difficult to decide whether to include the 1989 educational expectations or their educational attainments as of 2000–2001 in this part of the analysis. The decision to focus on expectations was based on two considerations: (1) that the time and therefore causal order of the variables are clearer if one uses 1989 expectations and (2) we wanted to consider educational attainment as an *outcome* of remaining in a rural area (see the next section).

their education, assuming little they did would make much difference in any case? Presumably there were feedback loops, but we were not able to untangle them with the data at hand. Nevertheless, it is clear that these attitudes played an important role in the way youth who opted to stay in rural areas made sense of this decision.

4.2 The Effects of Staying Rural

Our data allow us to take this analysis one step further and identify not only what measures help us predict which rural youth will remain in rural areas (i.e., which youth are at risk of staying rural) but also how this decision affects them and what other risks it creates. Here we can include the youth originally from urban areas for comparison.

Table 6. *Educational Attainment at Age 29 by Mobility Pattern*

Education at 29	Rural to rural	Rural to urban	Urban to rural	Urban to urban
High school or less	16%	4%	15%	6%
Nonuniversity	45%	27%	21%	24%
University	32%	53%	51%	50%
Postgrad	6%	17%	13%	20%
N	159	115	39	392

Note. The percent differences are statistically significantly different ($p < .001$), based on the chi-square test.

A number of patterns are evident in Table 6. First of all, those who were in a rural area at age 29 were more likely than those living in urban areas to have no postsecondary education (i.e., to have high school or less). Secondly, those in rural areas who started out in rural areas were more likely than those in any other situation to have pursued nonuniversity education (45% versus less than 30% in the other categories). Finally, there is a corresponding pattern when we examine university as an outcome. Fewer of those who followed the rural-to-rural path had any university, and fewer pursued postgraduate education.

What about work outcomes? Are youth who remain in rural communities likely to find full-time employment, despite their lower levels of education? The results in Table 7 suggest not. Rural youth who were in rural areas 11 years later were much less likely to have a full-time job in the week preceding the survey than were those in any other group, including the urban youth who moved to rural areas. Further, the reported average annual income was lower for the rural-to-rural group, even though the overall differences were not statistically significant.

Table 7 also shows us the levels of satisfaction that youth in the various scenarios report at age 29. It is important to keep in mind that there were no differences worth noting in the reports of satisfaction with one's personal or family life or place of residence. Rural youth were as satisfied with these components of their lives as were urban youth, regardless of where they had begun.

Table 7. *Satisfaction and Work Outcomes at Age 29 by Mobility Pattern*

	Mobility pattern				
Work outcome	Rural to rural	Rural to urban	Urban to rural	Urban to urban	Sig.
Employed full time previous week	59%	85%	70%	81%	.001
Average income	$19,819	$24,200	$23,695	$24,516	*ns*
Satisfaction with					
personal life	88%	95%	96%	90%	*ns*
family life	94%	97%	91%	93%	*ns*
place of residence	81%	87%	86%	84%	*ns*
educational attainment	66%	90%	82%	79%	.01
work/career	74%	73%	96%	80%	*ns*
career opportunities	51%	76%	59%	75%	.001
educational opportunities	65%	90%	73%	82%	.001

A different picture, however, emerged when we looked at satisfaction with educational attainment. Rural youth who were in rural communities 11 years later were much less satisfied with their attainments. The contrast is particularly striking when one compares this group to rural youth who moved to a city (66% satisfied versus 90%). Our qualitative data strongly echo this finding, with respondents noting that those who moved away from their rural home were those most likely to be ambitious and educated. Two quotes from our rural informants (2001) exemplify their thoughts about such people: "People that get their education … can go and get better jobs" and "They want to get out and make something of themselves."

A difference also emerged when we looked at satisfaction with work or career, but this time the two least satisfied groups were those who had started out in rural areas. The difference is not quite large enough to reach statistical significance ($p = .055$), but the pattern is clear. This outcome may warrant further investigation in other analyses.

The last two rows of Table 7 show the youths' perceptions of their opportunities. Here we see that those who were in rural areas at age 29 saw themselves as having lower opportunities for both education and for their career. These lower opportunities, or the perception of them, put rural youth at risk.

Table 8. *Gender and Mobility Pattern by Whether the Youth Has a Child or a Full-time Job at Age 29*

Gender	Pattern	Has child	Employed full time
Male	Rural to rural	72%	78%
	Rural to urban	43%	88%
	Urban to rural	71%	73%
	Urban to urban	40%	86%
Female			
	Rural to rural	80%	48%
	Rural to urban	52%	81%
	Urban to rural	65%	69%
	Urban to urban	51%	76%

We should also note the gendered nature of these mobility patterns. As we saw, young women were more likely to be in the rural-to-rural group. There are other important differences (see Table 8). Women in rural areas at age 29 were more likely than rural males to have had one or more children, and they were much more likely than their urban counterparts to have had a child. They were also less likely than males and less likely than urban females to report having a full-time job in the week before the survey. Females were more likely to stay in or return to rural communities, a risky paradox that we take up in the next section.

5.0 Implications and the Youths' Views

Overall, our findings to this point suggest the need to more carefully consider the risks of being rural for youth. As Shucksmith (2004) observed, young people are forced to make decisions about their education, including subject choices and when to leave formal education. While this has always been the case, the insights from risk-society theory and research highlight that in today's socioeconomic context "young people need to develop active transition behaviours, which enable them to negotiate their way successfully" (Evans & Heinz, 1995, p. 10). Individuals therefore need to strategically consider what (individual) life-course pathways will lead them to success, through active transition behaviours and within a climate that is increasingly in demand for credentials (Shucksmith, 2004) and ever more dependent upon higher levels of formal postsecondary education (Lehman, 2004). In this context, our findings collectively imply that there is a need to more fully consider what active transition behaviours would look like for rural youth who wish to remain in their home communities, since all of the pathways to success that are understood to be strategic and/or successful are premised on pathways that lead youth out of their rural homes and communities.

With respect to our findings, it is clear that rural youth have come to embody and intuitively understand many of the systemic and structural factors that shape their paths over their life-course. Reflecting upon the connection between the education system and her rural locale, one interview informant commented, "Basically yeah.

I go out. I get this [credential]. I can get a job in a city, in a town, anywhere, and I don't have to live in this little teenie community anymore" (rural informant, 2001).

This articulation of the relationship between education and mobility is substantiated in both our qualitative and quantitative data. It is further substantiated by Corbett's (2007, 2006) important work around schooling in rural communities. "It is fairly clear that formal education is understood and experienced by most school-successful rural youth as a ticket to elsewhere and that formal education correlates powerfully with out-migration from rural communities" Corbett (2006, p. 297). Our analysis clearly supports such an observation, where respondents expecting to get a university education were more likely to simply relocate to an urban centre, while "the ones who stay[ed] [were] usually the ones who drop[ped] out of high school" (rural informant, 2001). Accordingly, Corbett argued that the formal educational system teaches many youth to leave their home communities, a process he conceptualized as "learning to leave." This concept understands rural education as a complex process, which works to act like a bridge to greater out-migration, whereby accrued educational capital leaves many rural youth disconnected from their home communities. As Corbett's insights note and our findings support, there is an urgent need for discussions around the role of education in rural areas and how it can be structured to help support rural youth rather than draw them out of rural communities. More broadly, we suggest that risk-society theory, which has direct impacts upon understanding policy, needs to better account for the nuances of risk that are present in the lives of rural youth.

Our findings also raise some important connections between rural youth's attitudes, mobility, and employment. Rural youth who stayed in or returned to rural communities were significantly more likely to say that good luck was more important than hard work and that people who accepted their condition were better off than those who tried to change things. This pattern indicates a distinctly different set of attitudes for youth who chose to stay, compared with that of youth who chose to leave rural communities. Within the risk discourse, the notion of "luck" and of "havin' it made" (rural informant, 2001) runs explicitly counter to the importance placed on strategic individualization of life-course decisions that are seen to be crucial to advancing through life in today's global economy. One might surmise that only the uninformed would consciously choose luck over reflexive engagement with their educational and career options. Yet our findings suggest that a belief in luck, in the context of having to leave to pursue advanced education, was a likely response to the risk imposed on youth who remained rural. When we also consider the patterns of employment and career opportunities for rural youth, in which rural youth reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction with their career and educational opportunities, their focus on luck highlighted what may well be an appropriate individual response to systemic risks of being active in a local and rural socioeconomic context. In answers to the question "What type of young people are more likely to leave?", the rural youth consistently and overwhelming portrayed those who left their home community as "ambitious," "more intelligent," "wealthier," "more motivated," "more knowledgeable," "more determined," "the fast-lane crowd," "individualistic," "stubborn," "business-type people," and "goal orientated." They were perceived to be everything the risk-society literature says most if not all youth have become.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) noted the paradox that while social structures such as class still shape young people's chances in many ways, these structures are

becoming increasingly obscure as individualist values and life-course pathways intensify: "Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure" (p. 14). Within the context of our study, this observation neatly captures many of our informants' understandings of their educational experiences and characterizes how they tended to situate the predicaments of being rural. As notions of class linked to access and education fade away, youth pathways have become politically and socially realigned to "emphasize the responsibilities of individuals in shaping their personal futures" (Heinz 1991, as cited in Sweet & Anisef, 2005, p. 5). Those that remain rural often couple this realignment to a sense of failure to "have gotten very far" (rural informant, 2001).

As the analyses above reveal, rural youth were less satisfied than urban youth with their educational attainments and saw themselves as having much lower opportunities for education and career. While systemic, the risk of being rural became captured through expressions of having failed to move away, or to use the discourse of risk theorizing, the failure of achieving mobility and modernity. When asked, "What do you think was different about the ones that moved away?" one respondent thoughtfully commented,

> "They've always wanted to. Like …, she was one of my friends and she
>
> wanted to become a minister and she did become a minister and she's
>
> ministering in Toronto. The rest of them didn't want to be ministers but
>
> they went where the jobs are, you know. They went to university and stuff.
>
> They didn't have a child and whatnot. They went to university and you
>
> know, went on further." (rural informant, 2001)

This statement captures the paradoxes of rural education and employment; rural is left to those "having a child and whatnot." Again, to leave and move on, that is, to be or become urban, is practically everything the risk-society literature posits it should be. It is embedded with progress, with an active plan ("they always wanted to"), with getting a job and an education, and with getting "on further." The problem here, of course, is that the individuals who stay in rural communities are portrayed, both by themselves and often in official policy (Corbett 2007), as having *failed* to leave. Asked about her remaining friends nearby, another informant (2001) commented,

> "They didn't go very far. None of them went to college. One married a
>
> fellow that works in the oil rigs, so she's pretty much set for life. One is
>
> going through a tough time like me, sort of little piddly jobs trying to find
>
> her calling. The other one is just barefoot and pregnant all the time."

The role of pregnancy and childbearing as a risk for young women is articulated in these quotes. Having a child ties women more than men to the rural community. This reality may not necessarily be a bad thing, since it keeps rural women in the area. And as one youth researcher notes (Shorthall, 1992), having these young

women in the community is often a resource, one that more and more rural communities are tapping. However, there are tensions.

5.1 The Paradox(es) of Coping with the Risk of Being Rural

> "Well my husband really, really wants me to work, so he encourages me a
>
> lot to go out to work and do whatever I can, so he gives me support. And
>
> as far as my family—my mother thinks I should be staying home and
>
> raising my family— so she makes me feel guilty." (rural informant, 1994)

In a study of rural women's work in rural and resource-dependent communities, McLeod and Hovorka (2008) noted that historically "rural women are valued for their traditional roles as wife and mother, as well as their ability to connect the private and public sphere, particularly through their informal labour in civic/voluntary sectors" (p. 79). In the past rural spaces/places were highly gendered and often defined negatively by women. In their study of High Level, Alberta, the authors found that in a diversifying and productive economy, many women had found high levels of satisfaction and felt a connectedness to their community. They concluded,

> Their positive work experiences have fostered a sense of belonging in High
>
> Level, as have their active involvement in and contribution to both economic
>
> and social realms. These findings challenge and broaden conceptualizations of
>
> resource towns in general as necessarily "male spaces," dominated by
>
> interests, issues, and needs of male residents. (p. 88)

Evidence from our study supports such a finding, with the caveat that many rural women seek opportunities and report a link between work and place and contentment with their home community. However, for many young women the importance of relationships colours their explanations of why they are or are not living in their rural home. For example, when asked why she moved away from home, one rural informant (1994) said, "because I was moving here with my boyfriend … He got a job so I moved here with him [to this rural community]." A significant number of the young women (and a few of the young men) moved to a locale with a significant other, such as a spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, or fiancé or partner. If the place he/she moved to was rural (which, for youth who started in rural areas, it often was), then the accompanying partner lived in a rural area. If it was a city where the significant other had already been living, then the couple moved there. But the lure of these ties, especially if the locale was close to the family of one or both partners, was clearly strong.

However, in our sample, young women in rural communities often had a very difficult time finding educational and economic opportunities, unlike those in McLeod and Hovorka's study. This suggests that a key lens through which many rural women come to define their circumstances hinges on broader structural and systemic factors, which if absent then manifest themselves in rural subjectivities that are defined negatively. For example, faced with a lack of opportunity and daycare, one of our female informants, whose husband worked, noted, "When I was 17 I didn't think I'd be married and have a child by 20." This person

subsequently left school. Another rural woman who no longer lived in her home community simply stated, "If I had an opportunity to go home, I would."

Corbett (2007) reported that in rural families who value education, girls and women are particularly encouraged to leave their home communities as strategies to avoid traditional gender roles. He noted, however, that decisions that appear coherent in any particular setting can only be properly grasped by considering the common practices in the community itself. This notion reminds us that rural youth, and rural females, are not one way or another but rather are agents of community practices that can and do change. Further, the pressures on rural youth are often paradoxical (e.g., rural places are great places to grow up but have fewer opportunities than do urban places). As some rural respondents noted, some wanted simply to "escape the country" and some were just excited about something new. For example, one rural respondent noted that he "liked the idea of moving to the city," yet he was "scared at first!" (rural informant, 1994). In fact, *rural* itself is not a homogenous category, a point our respondents spoke to as they moved in and between rural communities and towns in search of opportunity, home, and family. Recognizing these tensions, and recognizing the different sets of risks faced by rural youth in and within different communities of practices, would go a long way to opening up new, potentially different conceptualizations of what it means to grow up rural for youth in a risk society.

The responses varied among our sample of 17-year-olds to the question, "What types of young people stay in their home community?" Some indicated the importance of close ties to where they lived, describing these people as those who "don't really want to leave" and "want to stay closer to family." Others, however, reflected the fatalism that we noted in the quantitative analyses. They described the ones who stay as "those who don't have the money to leave and can't get out," "people who don't plan on going to college or university," "people without too much ambition," and "ones … content with limited opportunities."

Here again we are left with the impression that rurality is seen as everything that modernity is not. As Corbett (2006, p. 290) noted, rural communities are often portrayed as "... other, as failures, as throwbacks, as primitives, as uncultured, as economically unproductive," despite the fact that they also often see themselves as stewards of the land who support and sustain often unsustainable urban lifestyles. In much of the research literature and the discourses around education and economic development policy, "rurality is powerfully associated with the past, with place, with stagnation, and with a kind of vague shame" (Corbett, 2006, p. 291). Despite this portrayal, rural youth, families, and communities not only eke out a living but also actively choose to remain and recreate their lives in a rural environment that they struggle to see in more positive terms. Despite the difficulties, this positive perspective does exist.

These positive feelings are evident in some of the responses from the 1994 interviews, which give us a bit more insight into the reasons for rural youth's leaving or staying and into their feelings about their decisions. Their comments included: "[I] picked this community because my grandmother lived here and I know people and the area; I'd stayed here summers and I liked it"; "I don't know why people can't find work. I'm flexible and they can throw me anywhere"; "I needed to be near the ocean"; "It's close to home, and … I liked the atmosphere"; and "Most of my friends are here."

Connections with friends and family and being close to where one grew up were major considerations for many of the study participants who stayed in or returned to rural areas. Other comments from the 1994 interviews confirm this notion; many expressed views such as: "I grew up here and his parents were close. We are close to family, friends, everything"; "I didn't like it in Ontario, because I didn't have any family and most of my friends were down here"; "I wanted to go someplace and experience life. After two years I was ready to come back. I didn't have any family out there [in the west]"; "My brother lived [in a city in New Brunswick]. Also I was looking for work. Didn't find anything so I came back home"; and "Basically I have a lot of relatives and lodging was available. I grew up in the summers there and I just really like the area."

The last comment highlights one of the contributions that rural social capital provides. While rural families may not be able to help fund further education or expose their children to what Bourdieu calls cultural capital, such as museums, they are often able to provide access to housing for young adults. Several of our study participants spoke to this notion in their 1994 responses: "I had free room and board living with relatives"; "The place we have now is her Mom's and so we got it fairly cheap"; and "I moved in with my grandfather when I left my husband and this is where my parents live. This house is mine, sort of; it's in my Dad's name but I live here. He's giving it to us [my common-law husband and me]; we don't pay rent, we just have the upkeep and bills."

In addition to providing free or subsidized housing, parents and other family members also provide help when the young person is in trouble. As we saw above, family can provide a safe environment after a relationship breakup. They also provide respite if they are ill. For example, one study participant said, "I came home because I was sick and I couldn't work." On the other hand, some young people become the caregivers for family members who need assistance, as several study participants attested: "When my grandfather died, my uncle asked us to come live here for the upkeep of the house"; "My mother is sick and I came here to help out my family"; "My grandmother had breast cancer. I came back to help on the farm"; and "[we came back here] because my dad is in a wheelchair and my mom has cancer, and we wanted to be close to a hospital."

Such mutual support and reliance on networks and social capital are, of course, not unique to rural youth—urban youth also have close ties to their families. What is different is that in order to be physically close to their rural-based families and communities, rural youth have to live in or near these rural communities, which often lack the educational and occupational opportunities that urban youth take for granted. Even if there were no rural–urban differences in community and family ties (evidence for which was seen in Table 3), the effect those ties have on creating tensions and risks for the young person differs in the two contexts.

Nevertheless, even the youth recognized that all is not rosy simply because it is rural. Some of them did not see themselves as having much choice in their life chances, reflecting the fatalism seen in the quantitative analyses. The following statements from study participants exemplify this sentiment: "I grew up here; it's not like I had much choice"; "This is always where I lived since I was six. A very nice community, but not too many jobs"; "I lived here all my life. Never moved out, because jobs are here and can't get a steady job to afford all my bills"; "[We] came here to try [to] balance our money a little better. If it was up to me I wouldn't be here. I'm a people person and like to live in town and see family every day and

now I don't get to"; and "I've always lived around here. Always want to move out of it but haven't and probably won't."

Interestingly many of the rural youth who moved from their home communities moved to another rural community, often one just a little larger than the original one. The following comments are from those who made this small-step transition: "I wanted my little girl to go to nursery school and we had no transportation so we moved up here to be closer"; "There wasn't nothing in that town.… I couldn't go outside without everyone knowing where I went. Everyone was too noisy and nosey.… [There is] more opportunity down here—more places to go, things to do, more things for the kids, better shopping, and better all around"; and "It was close to home but not too close."

The issue of rural youth pathways is complicated, as many rural youth also maintain positive attitudes toward various aspects of rural life and community. Many interview respondents in our study reported that they preferred to raise their children in a rural community because they perceived it to be safer. For example, one participant said, "I don't think I'd want to raise a child in a big city, rather in a more rural setting. Yet, there are more opportunities in a city…. However, safety comes first" (rural informant, 1994). The city as a more opportunity-oriented entity was voiced by both rural and urban respondents (1994), for example, "I like Quebec a lot, there's a lot of theatre there"; "[Banff]'s beautiful, a variety of people, culture, [and] good job opportunities"; and "[I] went to Calgary because there are a lot of jobs there."

Overall these comments attest to the conflicted feelings many youth have about choosing where to live, since:

> By and large, rural youth feel that while rural communities have several
>
> attractive elements (e.g., low crime, affordable housing, good place to
>
> raise a family), these "attractive elements" are not necessarily important
>
> elements for youth—especially those individuals less than 25 years old. In
>
> this context, rural communities are good places to return to, but offer only
>
> limited opportunities for youth who are looking forward to a post-
>
> secondary education or a career. (Malatest, 2002, p. 13)

However, in the absence of systemic solutions to address the risks of staying home for rural youth, many individuals embody socioeconomic problems as an inability to get very far, we find. This perception, along with all of the accompanying statistical indicators, is often used to verify the problems of rural communities and economies. As Corbett (2006, p. 297) commented, "This is the tension between community development and out-migration." As Stewart (1996) similarly noted:

> In the two political imaginaries of center and margin there is a telltale
>
> contrast: the one, relatively self-assured and oblivious in its privilege,
>
> delimits clean lines of will and action to leave its mark on the world, while
>
> the "Other" raids, poaches, stays at the ready to take advantage of

opportunities that come along, and sifts through signs of its own otherness

and remainder for something of lasting value. (p. 42)

6.0 Conclusion

There is widespread concern about youth out-migration from rural areas. This is often seen as the key challenge facing many rural communities in North America. The Canadian Rural Partnership report (Dupuy, Mayer, & Morissette, 2005) stated, "There has been for some time substantial concern regarding the loss of young people in rural communities" (p. 1). They observed that there is a predominant sense that rural communities offer few opportunities for their younger people, many of whom leave for urban centres and do not return. Their report studies migration patterns of the rural youth population to understand what policy intervention might help rural communities "stop the decline of their youth population and favour economic growth" (p. 1). However, we need to move beyond documenting the patterns to understanding the experiences of youth who leave as well as those who stay.

Our findings suggest that more attention is needed on what it is about our ideas of modernity and urban mobility that leads so many rural youth to leave their home communities. In other words, the task is to turn the question of what is wrong with rural communities inside out. This kind of conceptual move would require us to think about why the educational progression of advancement seems to necessarily run counter to a rural way of life. As Rugg and Jones noted (cited in Shucksmith, 2004, p. 54), "For most students, the decision to take a degree reflected an unthinking progress through education rather than a conscious rejection of rural life."

From a policy and risk-society perspective, actions and incentives to date clearly favour supports to leave, whether tacitly or explicitly, such that the notion of what a support-to-stay would look like from an educational or governmental point of view is barely fathomable. Until we better understand the connections between education and youth out-migration within today's risk society, as well as the experiences and attitudes of young people who opt to live in rural areas as adults, the risks of being rural will continue to remain largely invisible. Solutions will continue to favour an urbanized response to risk, embedded in taken-for-granted linkages between mobility and successful life-course advancement based on "a bourgeoisie ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world" (Stewart, 1996, p. 118).

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