

Farewell to rural Nova Scotia? A participatory action study
of rural youth migration in Atlantic Canada

by

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Abstract

The outward migration of young people from rural communities is a theme that is present in folklore and work culture in Nova Scotia. Recently, outward migration from rural communities in the province is an issue that is gaining increased attention due to the economic and community ramifications of significant migration trends. Using a participatory action research approach, this study focuses on the lived experiences of young adults who grew up in one rural community. Qualitative interviews were done with eight participants who have either stayed in, left, or returned to their rural hometown. Interviews focused on identifying key factors used to make migration decisions.

An analysis was completed using political economy and structural social work theories in order to understand these key factors and possible points for action. Key findings include the need for more relevant guidance for rural youth in high school and later in life, community development strategies that focus on young adults, and increased government attention and consultation on rural youth issues.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Krista Johnson. A fellow small town girl whose love of her rural hometown made us instant friends. Her dedication to her hometown and the people there taught me so much about social work. You are deeply missed, Krista.

Shine on friend.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

*“I grieve to leave my native land,
I grieve to leave my comrades all,
And my parents whom I love so dear,
And the bonnie, bonnie lass that I do adore.”*
Farewell to Nova Scotia, Author unknown.

The folksong *Farewell to Nova Scotia* reflects the remorse of a young sailor who has to leave home in order to gain work on the ocean. This tune is an old one and has been sung at last call by generations of Nova Scotians, but is there still cause to sing it as we have moved from an age of tall ships into a more modern age? The migration of young people from rural areas to cities has begun to concern many Canadian communities, some of which are losing as many as 15% of their young people (aged 15-29) annually (Dupuy et al., 2000). There is mounting concern that the story behind this song is one that continues for many rural youth in Nova Scotia. The purpose of this study is to investigate the opinions of young people about rural youth migration within one rural community in Nova Scotia. In particular, it focuses on the experiences that impact the decisions of youth to stay in or leave rural communities.

1.1 Migration of rural youth

There are many factors that could play a role in the outward migration of youth from rural communities in Nova Scotia. This is a complicated issue and it is important to understand who is leaving Nova Scotia and why.

The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council describes how young people aged 15-29 make up the largest portion of people migrating out of Atlantic Canada, stating that the region has lost over 5,200 youth over the last decade (Chaundy, 2012, p.56). Statistics Canada found that between 2004 and 2011 as many as 2,200 rural people left rural areas of Nova Scotia to go to other provinces, mainly Alberta (Chaundy, 2012). This is much higher than the combined outward migration from rural and urban Newfoundland and New Brunswick. According to various projections from Statistics Canada this outward migration trend will continue through the next decade (Demography Division, 2010).

It is difficult to get a clear picture of inter-provincial migration within Canada. Even more difficult is to make projections based on this information (Chaundy, 2012). Issues such as quickly changing economies, shifts in labour force skills, and contract work make it difficult to record how people move within Canada. This may be further complicated in the future with the recent elimination of the Long-Form Census.

Within the study by Malaetest & Associates (2002), it was found that a majority of rural community leaders felt that attracting young people into their communities would result in higher financial costs than youth could bring in terms of social capital. I disagree; with an aging population and a changing technological landscape, rural communities are in jeopardy. The only sustainable way in which to ensure the rural fabric of Canada stays vibrant is to make room for youth.

1.2 Rural youth: “Stayers”, “leavers”, “returners”, and “in-migrants”

Within the Canadian literature on rural youth migration there are three classifications of youth based on their geographical location (Dupuy et al., 2000; Looker, 2001; Malatest and Associates, 2002). These definitions will be used through this research and are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Categories of youth based on migration experience

Source: Malatest & Associates, 2002

<i>Stayers</i>	Youth who have always resided in their rural community. ¹
<i>Leavers</i>	Young people who left their rural community and now reside in a larger urban centre.
<i>Returners</i>	Youth or young adults who left their rural home town for an urban area, but have since returned.
<i>In-migrants</i>	Youth who moved from an urban community to their current rural community.

¹ It is unclear in the literature (Dupuy et al., 2000; Looker, 2001; Malatest and Associates, 2002) if “always” refers to residing in the rural community from birth or if it is simply where a young person went to high school. However, for the purpose of this study a stayer will be a person who has remained in what they identify as their “home town” after high school.

These four migration categories are not exclusive, there are other types of migration. As this research will reveal; migration is a personal and fluid choice that may change over time. The migration status of an individual may also vary depending on the context and type of migration being discussed. For this particular study, I relied on my view of an individual's migration status and then confirmed that status with the participant during the interview. I consider any migration away from the area in which the participant went to high school as "leaving". This includes going to another province, moving to Halifax and, although no one in this study represented this choice, moving to a rural community in another area of the province.

1.3 Research question

The principal research question for this study is: *What factors do rural youth consider when making the choice to stay in or leave their rural community once finished high school?* The research shows that seeking employment and education in urban areas is the chief reason Canadian youth leave their rural community (Dupuy et al., 2000; Looker, 2001; Malatest and Associates, 2002). Yet, there may be other issues that young people see as being important factors in their initial decision to stay or leave as well as their choices about migration throughout young adulthood. The research also points out that this choice is difficult for rural youth because of their residential preferences (Kirkpatrick et al, 2005) and their ties to parents and community (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006).

There are also three sub-questions that are addressed within this study as well. The first is: *What role do high school guidance counselors, parents, friends and adult allies² play in supporting youth to make decisions about migration?* According to Kirkpatrick Johnson et al. (2005) and Ley, et al. (1996) the perceptions, experiences, and expectations of adults in the community effect what choices young people make regarding migration. Second, because many rural youth state that someday they want to return to a rural community (Malatest & Associates, 2002) explored the question: *How do stayers, leavers, and returners view their choices about migration after being out of high school for an extended period of time?* Finally, I conducted an analysis of these findings in order to answer the question: *What are the implications of the above questions for social work with rural young people and their communities?*

1.4 The setting

*“West and south there were fields of flax,
And orchards and corn fields
Spreading afar and unfenced o’er the plains
And away to the northward
Blomidon rose and the forests old
And aloft on the mountains,
Sea fogs pitched their tents
And mists from the mighty Atlantic
Looked on the happy valley”*

Excerpt from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Evangeline, The story of the Acadian
expulsion of 1755*, originally published in 1847.

This project takes place in the area of Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley

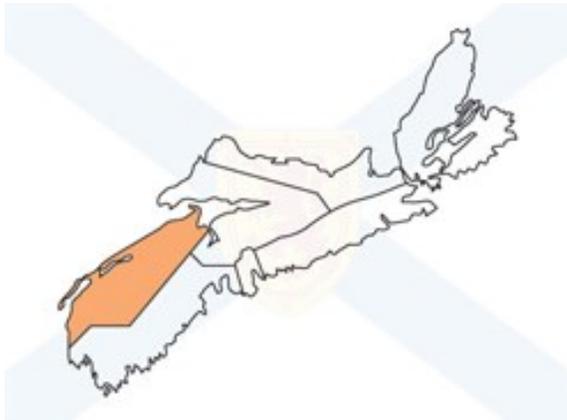


Figure 1: The Annapolis Valley

that encompasses the village of Canning and the surrounding countryside that skirts the Minas Basin. I was born and raised in Canning, where my parents own a beef farm. This area was chosen because of my local knowledge, personal connection with the community and because of the

efficiency of doing research in an area that is familiar, which will be described in later chapters. Known locally as “the Valley” (Figure 1³), this part of Nova Scotia has an impressive history, as described by Parker (2006) "Historically, the Valley's heritage is as rich as its soil, with roots reaching back four hundred years. Through the lows and highs of war and peace, depression and prosperity, it has few equals in North America. From the earliest days of colonialism the Valley was one of the most embattled territories in the history of the New World where the seeds of a future nation were planted, fought over, and cultivated" (Preface, IV). Although negating the rich history of the Mi'kmaq people, this quote speaks to the uniqueness of this place that needs to be considered when speaking about the current issues surrounding migration.

³ The shaded area of the map represents The Annapolis Valley. <http://www.explorenovascotia.com/nova-scotia-destinations/?rid=1>

The area is physically impressive. It was once described to me as “green and wild as a jungle” by a visiting Newfoundlander and this interpretation has stuck with me. The land can be both fertile and rocky with rolling pastures and impressive cliffs that jut out into the Minas Basin, an indentation of the Bay of Fundy off the Atlantic Ocean. The land and the water here are old and well-travelled. Fossils have been found in the area that were created three hundred and fifty million year ago, some of the oldest in the world (Parker, 2006).

One of our biggest claims to fame in this area are the highest tides in the world. The tides of the Minas Basin rise and fall an average of twelve meters twice a day compared to the average two meters along the rest of the Atlantic coast. Fourteen billion tons of sea water rush in and out of the basin during a tide cycle (Parker, 2006). A locally loved quote from Nova Scotia politician, journalist and well-loved character Joseph Howe reflects the general feeling of pride in this world renowned wonder, “Brag about your country. When I am abroad I brag of everything Nova Scotia is, has, or can produce, and when they beat me at everything else, I turn around on them and say, how high does your tide rise?”

The Mi’kmaq people have lived in the Valley for more than two thousand years and there has been evidence found of Paleo peoples who lived here at the end of the last ice age (Parker, 2006). These first peoples are part of the Eastern Wabanaki Confederacy of the five Algonquin tribes and the local area plays a large role in the stories of creation of these peoples. The demi-god warrior Glooscap is said to sit on top of Cape Blomidon where he looks out over all the Maritime provinces, Newfoundland, the Gaspé Coast and Maine. Here he served as teacher and protector of the people (Spicer, 1991). In one

history, the Minas Basin is created when a mischievous and monstrous beaver builds a dam between Parsborro and Cape Split, resulting in the flooding of the Annapolis Valley. Glooscap then destroys the dam by throwing huge boulders at it (becoming Five Islands) and the hero spends years chasing the beaver through Atlantic Canada.

Although it is difficult to estimate exactly how many Mi'kmaq people lived in the Valley area it is thought that their population could have been upwards of 50,000. Tragically the incursion of European settlers drastically changed the way of life for the Mi'kmaq people as forests were logged, rivers damned, and town settlements were put in place. By the 19th century the population had shrunk to 1,700 mostly due to the introduction of tuberculosis and smallpox according to the work of Parker (2006). However, the effects of colonial wars and the pressures of colonization should not be dismissed.

A large part of the culture of this particular area in the Annapolis Valley is the history of the Acadians. Settling first Port Royal in 1605 and then spreading throughout parts of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick (Parker, 2006), the Acadian people lived in this part of the world even as it passed between the hands of the French and English. In 1680 expansion eastward reached the Minas Basin and by 1755 most the area was the most prosperous and populated Acadian district in the region (Parker, 2006). This area is known for the extensive network of dyke land built by the Acadians that still stand today.

Although it was possible for the Acadians to remain a neutral party throughout this time of struggle between the French and English in 1755, after refusing to swear allegiance to the British, the Acadian people had their land confiscated and houses burned by the British. Thousands of people were put on boats to Louisiana, The New England colonies, and France (Parker, 2006).

After the expulsion the British recruited Protestants from Boston who were loyal to the crown to take over the Acadian farms. Eight thousand New England Planters met the call between 1760 and 1768, and brought with them African men and women who were kept as slaves until the abolition 1834 (Parker, 2006). They were later joined by others from England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany and Holland as well as those few Acadians who eventually made their way back. The population grew further after the American Revolution War when thirty-five thousand British loyalists came to Nova Scotia as refugees (Parker, 2006).

This history has greatly shaped the identity of the area, the story of the Acadians and the Mi'kmaq people have been greatly romanticized and it is often forgotten that the political history of the Minas Basin is a place of struggle, war and colonialism.

The Valley itself is about 125 kilometres long (figure 1). This study focuses on a specific area of Kings County that is the catchment area for Northeast Kings Education Centre high school, which includes areas of the Town of Kentville (approximately 6,000), the Village of Canning, and the countryside around the Minas Basin including parts of the North Mountain, (figure 2). It is important to note that these communities are seen as both separate in location and culture by the local people; a wider discussion on this

issue will be held within the literature review of this paper and within the discussion chapter.

The Village of Canning was once the biggest community in all of Kings County with a population of 2, 989 in 1891 (Parker, 2006). According to Parker (2006) and local lore, the village was a centre for agriculture, sea transport, and manufacturing throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Surrounding areas including Scotts Bay and Kingsport were mainstays in the ship building industry and were some of the busiest ports in the province. In the late 1880s a railway was built from Kingsport (just outside of Canning) to meet up with the Dominion Atlantic Railway in Kentville in order to capitalize on the apple production and sea-shipping enterprises of the area. For the town of Kentville this meant that the town became home to hotels and carriage houses and businesses that catered to travelers and eventually made larger developments more successful such as the army base at Camp Aldershot and the Tuberculosis Sanatorium that served the region. Many local youth also used the line to attend the high school in Kentville. The line was closed in 1961 due to the increasing availability of automobiles and the rapid decline of the apple market beginning in 1945 (Parker, 2006). Canning was also home to the Blenkhorn Axe Factory from the mid-1880s until the early 1960s.

As will be shown later in this paper, this area of the Annapolis Valley encompasses many different types of geographies and therefore communities which were economically structured around many different industries. Aside from ship building, fishing, and farming, many rural communities also had lumber mills and many people were seasonally employed in the forestry industry. Communities such as Steam Mill and Sheffield Mills still bear the names of some of these key industries that have since disappeared.

After World War Two many local industries changed as mechanization became more popular and more viable for local farmers, fishermen, and loggers. This era also saw a decrease in the staple apple industry of the Annapolis Valley. As transportation became easier, many people living in Canning and the surrounding areas were employed with companies outside their immediate communities. Small food processing, potato chip manufacturers and juice plants took advantage of locally grown produce. Many of these small operations were bought in the 1970s by larger corporations including Oxford Frozen Foods, Hostess Foods (now Frito-Lay) and Maple Leaf Foods. I have been told by many local people that these jobs were often seasonal and allowed people to work in the plants for a few months and then draw unemployment benefits or then work in farming, logging, or the fishery for the rest of the year. Although many of these companies are still large employers in the Valley, the use of contract labour, less reliance on local food production and other issues arising from globalization have created a situation where many of these once stable job opportunities are becoming less so for local people

.In the early 1980s Michelin Tires built a manufacturing plant in the area. As described by one of the participants of this study whose father has worked for the plant since it opened, Michelin was a well-respected, high paying employer in the Valley area when it first opened. Many young men were able to gain employment there without a high school diploma and were able to work their entire careers doing shift work at the plant while making a good income⁴. However, since the 1990s many of the job placements in the plant are allocated through a third party contractor and it is difficult to get a full-time position directly with the company. For new employees this means a lower pay scale, no or very few benefits, and little job security.

Farm work as it has been traditionally considered has also become less viable for many people in the area. Small family farms like the one on which I grew up are becoming less and less viable as the need to produce more at a lower cost becomes increasingly difficult. For many reasons such as transportation and changes to Employment Insurance, it has also become less viable for individuals to find farm work to support themselves and their families. Although a few small family farms remain, many are supplemented by other outside income. There are four or five larger more industrial operations in the area that are using most of the farm land and have also brought in migrant workers from Mexico and Jamaica to do much of the labour. However, there is a flourishing local farmers market, community shared agriculture, and food security movement in the area that is gaining in strength and popularity – for those that can afford it.

The agriculture industry in the Valley has many volunteer boards and organizations such as the Kings County Federation of Agriculture and active chapters of provincial organizations such as the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers Association, Nova Scotia Wine Growers Association, and the Nova Scotia Beef Producers. The Valley is home to many voluntary and social organizations which play a large role in the community. Local churches and religious organizations, while it is often reported that their membership is decreasing, offer a lot of social and financial support to the community. Other organizations like the Lion's Club and volunteer fire departments are present in many of the Valley communities. Also, many local community and seniors' clubs as well as the Women's Institute are popular gathering points for residents. Local festivals such as the Wharf Rat Rally, Digby Scallop Days and other community celebrations including the world-renowned Apple Blossom Festival are prominent events that showcase the community spirit and pride. Many of these events have taken place since just after World War Two. Finally, like other Maritime communities sports such as hockey and curling are popular activities. Local rinks are community hubs in the winter time for the old and young alike. This particular area of the Valley claims to be the soccer capital of Nova Scotia.

The current population of the Village of Canning is about 800 people. Although there is still a small grocery store, other conveniences such as a bank and a doctor's office are under continuous threat of closure. There hasn't been a gas station in the

⁴ Participants and community members who either work at the plant or know someone who does reported to me that someone who is directly employed by Michelin and is close to retiring may make around \$30 an hour.

community for ten years which forces people in more isolated communities to drive almost an hour to fuel up their cars. There is a small library as well as the Wilf Carter Historical Centre and Fleetwood Heritage Society. Canning is also home to the not for profit group Community Association of People for REAL Enterprise which supports people living with intellectual disabilities to run small social enterprises. The community is also home to a few art studios and a theatre company.

The local high school is an amalgamation of the high school in Kentville and the local village school. In this unique situation students from “town” are bused into the rural village to attend school. This was to ensure that students who were living in more isolated rural communities on the North Mountain had no more than an hour-long bus ride. This situation has meant that the village has become a central physical location for different communities, which is different from many other situations where rural students are bused into urban areas to attend school.

1.5 Personal reflection

I feel very connected to the history of the area where I grew up. I have always found it fascinating that I am part of such a historic place in the culture of so many. I think that this has meant that I value the history of the people that I engage with as an academic, especially rural people.

Both of my parents were born in the area and lived most of their lives there. My mother grew up in an area known as Scott’s Bay (home of the famous Cape Split). This area is about a half hour from the village and sits on the other side of the North Mountain. Her father’s family is from the area as far back as the first settlers and they played a major role in the ship building activity there and more recently in the farming industry.

My grandfather worked as a farmer, logger, and lobster fisherman. My grandmother was from the South Shore of Nova Scotia and her mother was a member of the Blackfoot First Nations from Massachusetts. My grandmother was a school teacher in Scott's Bay, where she met my grandfather.

My father's parents were from the areas just outside the village of Canning. My grandmother grew up on a family farm near Kingsport and my grandfather in the area where I grew up known as Pereaux (Acadian, meaning river). After my grandfather served in the Korean War he became a carpenter and my father's family lived in Halifax and Newfoundland as well as Canning, as my grandfather moved around with his work. My father attended the Nova Scotia Agricultural College and got a diploma in Agribusiness before he bought the farm where I grew up.

On our farm we raised beef cattle and a variety of produce. Not only was there harvesting and planting, but there was always an extended family of farm workers, people transporting produce and other farmers. During the late 1990s the agriculture industry in the area started to decline. This coupled with the Mad Cow Disease outbreak in 2003 left our farm struggling. There were many hours spent as a family doing the work that in the years before would have been good paying jobs for people in the community, but for many reasons were no longer viable for workers or the farmer. As an adolescent I began to appreciate the struggles that the community was facing. During that period I was particularly aware of the struggles within the agriculture sector as I witnessed our family business recoil.

My parents continue to live on the farm, but have long since taken jobs as school bus drivers in order to support themselves, and myself and sister when we were still

living at home. They still have fifty head of cattle that they maintain as replacement and feeder stock to other, bigger operations in the area. This is more a labour of love (or habit perhaps), than a labour for profit.

My sister and I were always expected to find options for careers outside of agriculture and were encouraged to leave the community all together. Growing up I had very negative ideas about my community and could not wait to “get out”. I felt a lot of pressure from teachers, friends, and family to leave in order to best use my talents. It was clear that more value was placed on young people who could make it in the city than young people who stayed in the area. Only after being away did I begin to question why I felt this way and this has since developed into an area of academic research for me. Although I continue to miss my family and community part of me stills feel that returning home would be seen as some sort of failure.

These histories, both of the place and of myself, are important to this research. As will be explained in subsequent chapters, doing research in rural communities often requires researchers to place themselves within the sphere community in order to gain trust and buy in from the community (Pugh and Cheers, 2010). As a student of social work I have borrowed from the rural social work literature, including work done by Pugh and Cheers (2010) and Collier (2006) in order to do this effectively. I have also considered work done by Finlay (2002) on reflexivity in order to endeavour to be aware of my position, thoughts, and experiences as they play a role in my understanding of this project.

This paper is organized into seven chapters. Chapter Two, the literature review will explore issues connected to rural youth migration as seen in Canada, the United

States, and in other developed countries. This chapter will also explore the meaning of “rural” and how it relates to this study in the Annapolis Valley. The third chapter will explain my theoretical lens for this project which is based on structural social work theory as applied to rural social work as well as political economy theory as explained by C.B. Macpherson. Chapter Four then discusses the methodology that was used for this study including an explanation of my work with the advisory committee for this project. In Chapter Five I present the findings of the research. The Chapters Six is a discussion of various topics that arise from the findings, including a discussion on possible next steps for research and action. The concluding chapter explores areas for further research based on this study, a review of the findings in light of the research questions and possible future actions for the advisory committee of this study.

2. Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Defining “rural”

When studying any area or population it is important to define clearly what the research is investigating. It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of what the term “rural” means within the context of this study. For rural social work and other disciplines in Canada, and around the world, defining “rural” is a complex task. Researchers must consider what the construct of rural means to people in the countryside, to policy makers, and to society at large. For the purpose of this research I will consider two main sources to define rural: Statistics Canada demographic and population information, and perspectives from rural social work literature.

2.1.1 Statistics Canada

As the main source of the country’s demographic data Statistics Canada’s view of the defining characteristics of rural is very important to this research. From 1971 to 2011 Statistics Canada defined “urban” as a location with a population of 1,000 people, or 400 or more people per kilometer squared. Anything outside of these parameters was considered rural (Statistics Canada, 2011a). This was reconceptualised in 2011 and the term “population centre” was used instead of “urban” (Statistics Canada, 2011a). As described on the Statistics Canada website (2011a) population centres are now also broken down into three groups: small population centres, medium population centres, and large urban population centres. The term “census rural” describes the population outside of the “population centre” (Bollman & Clemenson, 2008).

The standard geographical classifications (SGCs) continue this process further by breaking down areas in relation to population centres. Census metropolitan areas (CMAs) have a total population of 100,000, with at least 50,000 people living in the population centre of the area (Statistics Canada, 2011b). The second classification of an urban area is a census agglomeration (CA), which is an area with a population centre of at least 10,000. The term “rural and small town” (RST) are any areas outside of CMAs or CAs (Statistics Canada, 2011b; Bollman & Clemenson, 2008).

Finally, perhaps in a more focused attempt to define these ambiguous rural areas, there is a classification of census metropolitan influenced zone (MIZ). MIZs differentiate areas outside of CMAs or CAs by looking at the percentage of residents in these “rural” areas that commute to the population centres to work (Statistics Canada, 2011b). These areas are classified in five ways: Strong MIZs have 30% of the population commuting to core areas, moderate MIZs have less than 30% and more than 5% commuting, while weak MIZs have a portion larger than 0% but less than 5% commuting (Statistics Canada, 2011b). There are also areas which have no commuters (No MIZ) and territories that are outside of CAs that do not have any metropolitan commuters because of sheer distance (Statistics Canada, 2011b).

These classifications, although straightforward and helpful in conceptualizing “rural” in Canada, do not completely define rural areas. “Rural”, according to these conceptualizations is defined by the ways rural falls short of being urban. Even the use of MIZs limits how we consider what a rural autonomous area is.

Lohmann and Lohmann (2005) state that the quest to define rural for the purpose of social work is ongoing and, when required, mostly relies on the census for definitions. du

Plessis et al. (2001) argue for attention to definition, particularly where population density is concerned. There are three reasons given for this caution. The first is that the size of the rural population in Canada is bigger or smaller depending on what definition is used. For example, Canada's rural population could have varied from 22% to 38% in 1996 depending on the definition of "rural" used (du Plessis et al., 2001). The second is that using different definitions classifies different people as rural, and depending on the definition there is a significant elasticity and permeability between being rural or not. Finally, the characteristics of rural people change depending on the definition (du Plessis et al., 2001).

The area where my research takes place is within the C.A. boundary of Kentville (Figure 2⁵), Nova Scotia, which covers an area of 609.76 square kilometres and in 2011

had a population of 26,359 (Statistics Canada, 2012a). This CA is further divided into three census subdivisions. The subdivision where the study takes place is made up of at least 15 distinct community areas that I, as a local, can identify. A person familiar with this area would find it difficult to

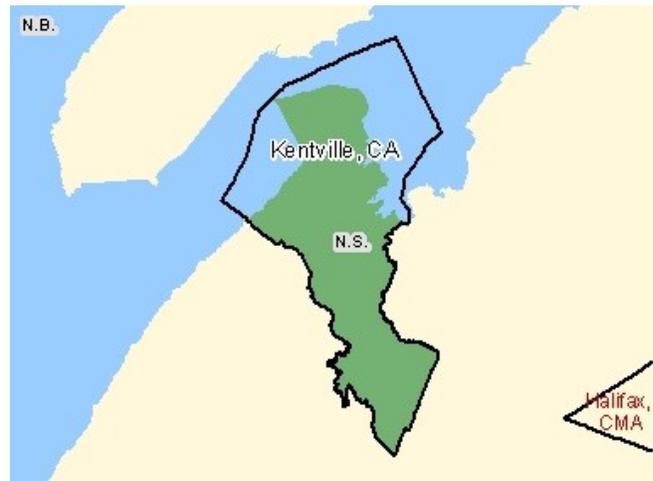


Figure 2: Census Agglomeration of Kentville

conceptualize the diverse geography of this area as a single CA. Further, because it is

⁵ http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page_Map_Carte_Detail.cfm?Lang=E&G=1&Geo1=CMA&Code1=210&Geo2=PR&Code2=12&Data=Count&SearchText=&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1&geocode=210

considered a CA, no degrees of metropolitan influence can be conceptualized here. If the Statistics Canada method was the only way to define rural this study would be dramatically different because the area is not technically a rural one under these standards. This raises a conflict whereby communities could define themselves as being rural yet may not be recognized as such by Statistics Canada.

2.1.2 Rural social work

Conceptualizing “rural” through social work literature has been significantly more helpful to this study. When defining rural from a social work perspective the history of the profession is an important starting point. Social work developed as a result of industrialization and urbanization. According to Collier (2006), “social work developed as a service to the industrial state and exists in order to tend the casualties of the system” (p.5). As capitalism took hold in the West and people migrated to urban areas to feed the demand for labour, family and kinship systems, which were the main source of support for individuals, began to erode (Collier, 2006). Social work as a profession was established in cities to offer the emotional and monetary support that was formally offered by family and community. Other histories of social work recount similar development, including work done by Jennissen and Lundy (2011). Collier (2006) argues that because of this history social work has an implicit urban viewpoint; I agree.

Within social work the definitions used to describe rural places are varied (Ginsberg, 2011; Pugh & Cheers, 2010). Pugh and Cheers (2010) observe that most social work texts take two approaches to defining rural based either on place or practice. Defining rural place is the approach taken in most social work literature and, as stated above, this tends to be through demographic descriptors (Pugh & Cheers, 2010; Lohmann

& Lohmann, 2005). The advantage of this method is that it creates criteria that are easily explained, generalized and duplicated (Pugh & Cheers, 2010), although not without problems as described above using the Statistics Canada example.

The second way social work tackles rural definitions is by asking if practices in rural communities are different from those in urban ones. Pugh and Cheers (2010) highlight evidence demonstrating that rural social work is both similar to and different from its urban counterpart. It is probable that many of the skills used by social workers in both rural and urban locations are the same, but the institutions, context, and services vary between the two locations. Finding the usefulness for social work practitioners mainly in this second definition of rurality, Pugh and Cheers (2010) define rural social work as “a set of issues and concerns around social work in non-urban areas” (p. xiii). This definition seems especially useful for my research because the issue of outward migration in Atlantic Canada is primarily a rural- i.e., non-urban- concern (Chaundy, 2012).

2.1.3 Defining “rural” for the present study

For this study I will be using two definitions for rural. First, the definition of rural within the rural social work literature seems most appropriate because it relies on the perspectives of myself as a researcher, the participants and the community identity as “rural”. Building upon this, the second definition that will be used is that given by the participants and the advisory committee of this study.

The historic and current identity of this area is clearly a rural one. This is expressed in one way through the reliance on agriculture and primary industry in the economic make-up of the area. The identity as rural is also expressed through the culture

of the area. One example of this is the Apple Blossom Festival which is held in the Valley every year to celebrate apple and other agriculture industries. Other examples of this are things such as the 4H report on the local radio station, the various Women's Institute groups, local Farmers' markets, and other groups that support rural ways of life. Although these may be small indicators of rurality to outsiders, for the community these institutions and groups play an integral role in the community identity.

A rural identity is also clearly found within the interviews that took place for this research. Although participants came from many locations, from the town to isolated parts of the North Mountain, every participant used "rural" or other similar descriptions as a way to describe their community in Section One. What is more interesting and perhaps relevant to this discussion are the differences between the physical location that each participant grew up in and the different ways that "rural" is represented in each of these locations. Below is a brief description of the three general areas that participants identified as their home communities and the varying degrees of rurality that they represent.

Town

People who are "from Town" may live in Kentville, New Minas, or Wolfville. These three areas represent the more urban areas and economic centres of this part of the Valley. This is where many people from the outlying areas go to do their shopping, banking, and connect with governmental organizations such as Access Nova Scotia.

The residential areas of these communities are characterized by subdivisions and apartment buildings; a single bus services these areas every hour and travels further down the Valley. Youth from Kentville take a school board bus to the Village in order to attend

high school, which is different from many rural communities where students are bused into more urban areas to attend school. This may be one factor that contributes to the connection that participants from Town have to a rural identity.

Village

The village in this study consists of Canning and the surrounding area. The high school is located in this area. The village has a small grocery store, a bank, and has recently been equipped with a doctor's office. There is no gas station and, while there is an active village business association, recent business closures have left many empty buildings on the main street.

The Mountain

“The mountain” is a term used by locals to describe any place that is located on or “over” the North Mountain. Small communities in the mountain are isolated and residents of these areas must come into the village for groceries and other services. For the most remote community, it can take half an hour to forty minutes to travel into the village.

As a local person, it also seems that many people who live in these more isolated communities are older adults and there a very few young families with children that live there. One example of this is the way that the school bus routes that were crowded when I went to elementary school, are now in danger of being eliminated because of lack of child passengers.

For participants of this study, it was important for them to explain to me which community they were from, even if the community might be viewed by outsiders as non-

existent or more adequately described as part of the village or town. This was especially true for the most rural of the participants. As one participant explained:

“I live [on the Mountain]⁶, that little corner. Not Canning, not the whole area. I’m very specific too. If people ask if I’m from the Valley I say “No. I’m from [the Mountain]. I said that to someone once and they were like, ‘Oh. You are one of those people who say they aren’t from the Valley, but some small community just outside the Valley’. It was really funny. I feel like people from small towns have that pride of where they come from.”
(Stayer, female)

The importance that participants of this study place on location within rural places highlights the importance of having a fluid definition of “rural” to use in this type of research. This need is met with the use of rural social work literature.

2.2 The problem of youth migration in Atlantic Canada

There are many factors that could play a role in the outward migration of youth from rural communities in Nova Scotia. It is a complicated issue, and it is important to understand who is leaving the province and why. To begin this discussion I will outline what we know about those leaving and staying in the province in terms of demographics.

It is important to understand rural youth migration in the context of an ageing population. This aging is happening faster in the Atlantic Provinces, where, by 2036 the median age will be 8 to 10 years higher than that of the rest of Canada (Demography Division, 2010). The Demography Division of Statistics Canada (2010) projects the overall median age of Canadians to be about 42 years by 2036, and the median age for

⁶ The name of the specific community has been removed in order to protect the identity of the participant

Atlantic Canadians to be as high as 52 years. In Nova Scotia the average age is 41.3 years (Statistics Canada, 2011c); in 2006 the number of people over 65 years was just over 15% of the total population. That percentage rose to 16.6% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012b).

Much of the outward migration discussed in this study by participants is interprovincial migration, i.e. movement from one province to another. It is difficult to get a clear picture of inter-provincial migration within Canada. It is even more difficult to make projections based on what information is available (Demography Division, 2010; Chaundy, 2012). Issues such as quickly changing economies, shifts in labour force skills, and contract work make it difficult to record how people move within Canada. In the future, I think this may be further hindered by the elimination of the long-form census in Canada.

The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (Chaundy, 2012) describes how young people aged 15-29 make up the largest portion of people migrating from Atlantic Canada, stating that the region has lost over 5,200 youth over the last decade (p.56). However this number may be even higher. Instead of recording the location of a person's workplace as identified by their employer, Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey assumes that the area an individual gives as their permanent address is the same area in which they work (Chaundy, 2012). For example, it is common for individuals who work outside Nova Scotia to retain their residence in the province⁷. Focusing on rural communities also

⁷ This could be a situation where one partner works in Alberta for six weeks at a time, while the other stays in Nova Scotia to raise their children, work another job, or to care for family.

means that migration within provinces, but also rural-urban migration within provinces. 11,500 people migrated to Halifax in the fifteen years between 1996 and 2011 from other areas of Nova Scotia. Many were young people (Chaundy, 2012).

Statistics Canada found that between 2004 and 2011 as many as 2,200 people left rural areas of Nova Scotia to go to other provinces, mainly Alberta (Chaundy, 2012). This is much higher than both the overall outward migration from Newfoundland and New Brunswick for both rural and urban migrants. According to various projections from Statistics Canada the outward migration trend will continue through the next decade (Demography Division, 2010).

2.3 The outward migration of youth from rural areas: The research

Studies from across the globe have explored why youth leave rural communities and what brings them to that decision (Hektner, 1995; Dupuy et al., 2000; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). The literature clearly states that such choices are not easy for youth to make, and contribute to considerable stress in their lives in late high school (Donaldson, 1986; Hektner, 1995; Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005). This is particularly true for youth who feel their only option is to leave (Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005).

Research also identifies that the choice to stay or leave is unique to rural youth. This is because the variety of options for work and education available to youth in urban areas is simply greater. Youth from cities or suburbia can pursue a breadth of opportunities without choosing between pursuing these opportunities and remaining close to family and friends (Donaldson, 1986; Hektner, 1995). In the following discussion I present three key Canadian studies on the outward migration of rural youth. I then present key themes found in these studies and other literature.

2.3.1 Three key Canadian studies

Between 2000 and 2002 the Canadian government released three studies on rural youth migration. These studies reveal that, for a brief period of time, the federal government had an interest in exploring this problem and the effect it was having on the strength and prosperity of the country's rural communities.

Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette undertook the first study in 2000. *Rural youth: Stayers, leavers and return migrants* answers basic questions about the migration of young people from rural communities, those who stay in rural communities, and those who leave and come back. The data are based on Canadian census information gathered from 1991 and 1996, administration data based on the federal T1 tax records from 1986-1997, and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics of 1993-1997. The objective of their study was to present information to help policy makers establish the basic facts about rural migration in order to create effective intervention policies. The study offers statistical information on the economic lives of young people in rural and urban areas. It also highlights the differences between rural regions within Canada.

Dianne Looker, a research from the Maritimes, undertook the second study, released in 2001. In it, she begins by giving a brief overview of the literature available on the differences between and barriers faced by rural and urban youth. She then moves to detailed discussions on education and the state of rural schools - which also includes information from the literature concerning employment issues faced by rural youth. Looker offers a unique view of the literature, including migration patterns from the 1970s to 2001 and the stereotypes attached to both staying and leaving the home community. She also brings to light the social ties that connect many young people to their

communities. The paper ends with a list of further possible research questions whose answers could help make suitable policy and programs for rural youth. These questions include the effects of gender and race on rural young people, family dynamics, and other reasons for staying (or not) in the community. She also presents policy issues such as technology advances, youth focused policy, and the effects of urban boundary changes on rural communities (Looker, 2001).

Malatest and Associates Ltd. completed the final study in 2002 in cooperation with a Rural Youth Steering committee, made up of various adult stakeholders in the communities and governments throughout Canada. It expands the economic focus of Dupuy et al. (2000) and conducts specific research using focus groups, surveys, and telephone interviews with youth, rural community members, and other stakeholders in Canada. The goal of the study was to create a blueprint for policy makers that is informed by those who will be affected and an overwhelming majority of participants suggested a rural youth strategy to achieve this. The discussion focuses on the perceptions that young rural people have of their communities, their future plans, and different community members' views of rural youth issues including migration. Six possible strategies were offered to entice youth to return to or restart in rural areas. The broad topics include enhancing employment opportunities, facilitating access to education and training, civic engagement initiatives, tax and fiscal policy considerations, rural "exposure" programs and work orientations, and a greater focus on recreation and infrastructure.

These studies demonstrate a concentrated effort by the Canadian government to explore issues affecting rural youth and it is therefore important to use them as a backdrop for other literature. It is also important to question why issues affecting rural

youth have fallen out of favour as a national issue after 2002 and why, even though it was widely recommended in these studies, the government has not further explored the creation of a Canadian rural youth strategy.

2.3.2 Themes from the literature

There are two recurring reasons why youth leave rural communities that were identified in the literature reviewed for this proposal: education and employment.

Icelandic researchers Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) identified young people's aspirations to achieve employment and educational prestige as a major factor in their choice to move from rural areas in the north of Iceland to more urban parts in the south.

The following is a brief discussion of the themes coming from Canadian and global research on youth migration.

The conflict of leaving

For many youth, choosing to stay or leave their rural community presents significant conflict and emotional upheaval (Donaldson, 1986; Hektner, 1995; Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005; Bjarnason, & Thorlindsson, 2006). Hektner (1995) sees the conflict as a uniquely rural one, stating that "unlike students in suburbs and cities who likely can go to college and find professional jobs in their metropolitan areas if they do so desire, rural students who want to develop their talents must often leave their communities permanently" (p3).

Recently, academic literature on rural youth migration has accepted the premise that making the choice to stay or leave is stressful for young people, especially for youth who anticipate leaving their community after they finish high school (Hektner, 1995;

Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005). Because of this conflict, rural youth, especially males, report more feelings of anger and hopelessness when considering their future than their urban peers (Hektner, 1995). This may be linked to Hektner's (1995) finding that rural youth feel it is important to live close to family as well as experience the world beyond their home community.

Kirkpatrick Johnson et al. (2005) studied rural youth's residential preferences and their aspirations for educational and career attainment and found that rural youth see these as incompatible goals and feel pressure to choose between one or the other. Relevant literature found that in this struggle career and educational aspirations won out over residential preferences in the majority of cases (Elder et al., 1996).

It is clear from the review of previous literature that there are many reasons rural youth move to urban areas. However, the above shows that there are also reasons why youth want to stay in their home towns or rural areas in general. Youth who grew up in rural areas state a higher level of satisfaction overall with their community than their urban counterparts in several studies (Hektner, 1995; Malatest and Associates, 2002; Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005). Also, in comparison with urban youth, rural young people see rural life as having benefits including being close to family, safer from crime, and more community oriented than city life (Hektner, 1995; Malatest and Associates, 2002; Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005). Those who left rural areas were also likely to say that someday they would like to return to a rural community (Hektner, 1995) and that it was a better place to raise a family (Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005). Leaving may disrupt social and emotional supports that rural young people have in their community and that youth who indicate more parental support than others surveyed are less likely to

want to leave (Bjarnason, & Thorlindsson, 2006). However, as greater migration happens youth are more likely to have family and friends in urban areas. Also, as communication technology increases there is less of a need for them to sever ties with their hometown (Bjarnason, & Thorlindsson, 2006).

Employment

The literature makes it apparent that securing employment and youth's aspirations for their career is a prominent factor in their choices to leave rural communities. For example, Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) found that rural youth in Iceland who believe that a young person can find a higher paying job elsewhere is the strongest predictor of their own expectation to migrate.

Unemployment rates in Nova Scotia as of January 2013 were 9.5% compared to the national rate of 7.0 % (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013). In the Annapolis Valley region specifically, the rate of unemployment was 10.4% as of February 2013 (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013). These numbers should be considered in a context where seasonal and service-based employment are important aspects of the economy (Chaundy, 2012). It is unsurprising that rural young people are more likely to work on and off throughout the year, usually coinciding with growing or fishing seasons (Looker, 2001). Not only do these statistics show that work may be hard to come by in this rural region, but may also impact how young people in the Annapolis Valley see prospects for their future careers.

Looker (2001) found that rural youth expected and ultimately achieve lower paying jobs than urban youth, this trend is also found in regards to education. The same

study also found that they are more likely to experience bouts of unemployment and lower wages in general (Looker, 2001). Dupuy (2000) found that labour markets for young people in rural areas were less favourable than those in urban ones, specifically for young people aged 20-29, whose unemployment rate was considerably higher than the national average. When considered through a gendered lens the difference in wage is even more apparent. Dupuy (2000) found that between 1993 and 1997 rural women aged 20-24 made \$1,383 less per year than their urban counterparts. Although one explanation for this is that women in rural areas tend to be less educated, when this variable was controlled rural women still made \$558 less per year (Dupuy, 2000).

There were several suggestions for how government at various levels could address employment needs of rural young people. In the study by Malaetest & Associates (2002) rural youth stated that employment must be a key factor in any plan to keep youth in rural communities. They stated that novel enterprises such as ecotourism need to be considered and promoted as viable options for youth. They also said that problems surrounding the less permanent nature of rural jobs (farming, fishing, etc) need to be addressed (Malaetest & Associates, 2002; *Beyond Freefall*, 2008). However, this should not be misunderstood to mean that these industries should not be supported; only that young people should have other options available in off-seasons.

As noted above, rural women's employment situation also needs attention. In the Malaetest & Associates (2002) and Valentine's (1997) research it was discovered that young rural women often find it hard to see themselves having a career in a rural community because of the emphasis placed on traditional gender roles. One way to combat this may be to encourage young women to go into trades and even establish

mentorship programs for both male and female youth to promote entrepreneurship and novel enterprise (Malaetst & Associates, 2002; Looker, 2001).

Education

Education plays a significant and varying role in the lives of rural young people. Corbett (2007) sees formal high school education as both being potentially disjointed from with the needs of rural youth who want to stay in their community and at the same time the “ticket out” for those who want to leave. Self-reported grades in high school are often predictors of rural youth’s expectation of leaving their communities (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). For example, young people who report having higher grades in high school also report that they intend to leave their rural community.

As shown by Dupuy in 2000 only 31% of rural youth (25-29) in Canada held university degrees, compared to 41% in urban areas. However, in rural areas in close proximity to university programs (Acadia University in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia, for example) a higher level of university graduates are present. This trend is also found in cities that are home to one or more universities (Dupuy, 2000).

The lower educational achievement of rural youth may be explained by fewer resources in small community schools and lower expectations held by teachers and family members (Looker, 2001). The employment options in rural Canada also tend to require less professional training; therefore it is harder for young people and other community members to see the payoff of spending so much time in post-secondary studies if they want to remain in their community.

The cost for a rural young person to attend university is also higher than that of a young urban person (Dupuy et al, 2000; Looker, 2001; Malaetest & Associates, 2002). Considering travel expenses from their school to their home community, the inability to live at home, and the possible lack of support from parents with experience attending university, it is clear that rural youth face challenges in acquiring post-secondary education that are not as familiar to urban youth (Malaetest & Associates, 2002; *Beyond Freefall*, 2008).

Looker (2001) found that a high number of rural youth leave their communities to attend post-secondary institutions, especially those between 19-24 years of age. She also found that the higher educational achievement aspired to or achieved, the more likely a young person is to leave her/his community (Looker, 2001; Dupuy, 2000; Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006). In some literature this is known as the “brain drain”. Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) found that this is especially true for rural women, who have higher educational expectations for themselves than rural men do.

Interestingly, young people who are most likely to return or relocate to a rural community are between the ages of 25-29 years and have a university degree. This is aptly called the “brain gain” (Looker, 2001; Dupuy, 2000). Although encouraging, these trends should be considered with caution. As Dupuy points out (2000), the number of highly educated youth returning to small communities is a small part of the overall outward migration, partly because the overall percentage of rural young people who get university degrees is already small. It is also important to mention that the other important factor for these youth is the availability of jobs in their field (Dupuy, 2000), which for the highest of educated people may mean work at a university.

Rural youth in Iowa, for example, also feel pressure to consider post-secondary education outside their community. Hektner (1995) explains that “the increasingly strong cultural norm of going to college influences the vast majority of adolescents from all types of communities to at least say that they are going” (p.11) He goes on to say that “this is no surprise, given the common wisdom expressed by one senior: ‘you won’t get anywhere without a college education’” (p.11). Because of this Hektner (1995) suggests that rural youth consider the level of education they desire and its corresponding success to be incompatible with living in rural areas. Hektner suggests that school guidance counsellors need to speak to youth about how they can “have the best of both worlds,” and that this could require more study of young adults living in rural areas who have a high level of post-secondary training.

Recently in Canada both provincial and federal governments, as well as organizations such as the Atlantic Province Economic Council have warned against an upcoming “skills mismatch” in Canada. Simply put, a “skills mismatch” arises when there is demand for labour in a certain field, yet there are not enough people in one area or within the country who are trained to do the work. Instead, individuals have degrees and skills sets in other areas that are already fully saturated with workers. For example, a Bachelor of Arts degree is very popular, however it is becoming increasingly harder to find work with this degree alone. On the other hand skilled trade workers in pipe fitting are in demand in Alberta, yet corporations are finding it hard to fill the positions available and sometimes remedy this by recruiting migrant workers from outside of Canada. Most notably the March 2013 federal budget outlines plans to support individuals to get training for careers that are described as being most necessary to the future economic

prosperity of Canada (Government of Canada, 2013). A few of the careers identified are those involved in information technology, the trades, and healthcare. The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council also pointed to the “skills mismatch” as one of the five key issues facing the labour market in Atlantic Canada (Chaundy, 2012). In order to address the issue they decided post-secondary institutions, such as community colleges and universities, need to gain more information about the labour market and better connect with employers to ensure that the needs of the Maritime labour force and industry are met (Chaundy, 2012).

Other themes

There are other important themes found in the literature outside of the conflict of leaving, education and employment. One that was touched on briefly above was gender. Not only do young rural women often have higher aspirations and achievement in education (Bjarnason, & Thorlindsson, 2006), they also experience rural life in different ways than men because of perceived stricter gender roles in rural communities (Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005). Looker (2001) also found that men often leave rural communities to find work, while women leave to be with their partners (Looker, 2001). Young men may also experience more conflict when it comes to making the decision to leave or stay (Kirkpatrick Johnson et al., 2005).

Another theme that is present but under-researched is the perception in rural communities of stayers, leavers, and returners. Looker (2001) found that youth who leave are seen in their home community as independent and successful. She also found that parents and community members thought it was necessary for youth to leave in order to

be successful. As stated above, youth who leave usually do so to gain education and advance their careers. Ley et al.(1996) suggest that rural communities may uphold this view because of how economic success overshadows civic engagement in Western societies. This counters the possible assumption that youth who have close ties to their community are more likely to stay. In reality, Kirkpatrick Johnson et al. (2005) found that youth who have stronger ties to parents and a higher level of community participation were most likely to leave after high school. If these are the widely held perceptions of those who leave rural communities, could the opposite views be held for people who stay? For example, are the youth who remain in their small town seen as dependent on others, not hard working, or without family and community connection? Malatest and Associates Ltd. (2002) found that community leaders were concerned with recruiting more “good” youth who have gained education and work experience. They stated that there is a perception among community members that youth who return to a rural area are those who “couldn’t make it in the big city” (p.19).

2.4 Chapter Two: Conclusion

Although this is just a brief review of literature on rural youth migration, it holds many implications for this study. This study explores many of the themes discussed in other literature, including the role that education and employment play in outward migration, the impact of local education, and the residential preferences of young adults. This study also explores the role of adult allies and the community play the decisions made by youth concerning migration in more detail than any of the previously mentioned studies. This includes the stereotypes of stayers, leavers, and returners that participants feel are present in their community.

Through the use of in-depth qualitative interviews, the present study is able to understand some of the themes offered in the quantitative studies reviewed from the literature. One key element of this is gaining a more in-depth understanding of the emotions and reasons for leaving outside of education and employment.

3. Chapter Three: Theoretical context

In this chapter I present the two main theories I use in order to understand and contextualize the information gathered in this research: political economy and structural social work theory. I also draw connections between the rural social work literature by Pugh and Cheers (2010) and Collier (2006) and structural social work theory.

3.1 Political economy

For this study it is important to understand the relationship between the political and economic atmosphere in Atlantic Canada, specifically Nova Scotia. Canadian political scientist C.B. Macpherson (1965) offers a straightforward explanation of how an individual's ability to provide labour is directly affected by the political and economic power of those who own the means of production. I feel as though this is a particularly relevant perspective for the discussion of rural migration.

Macpherson (1965) describes that liberal-democracy –of which Canada is one- as a double system of power. The first system of power “make[s] people do things which some or all of them would not otherwise do and...prevent[s] them from doing things some or all of them would otherwise do” (p.56). For example, it obliges people to participate in the market economy by selling their labour, and prevents them from pursuing leisure activities. It should be noted that Macpherson uses the term “liberal” in what he calls the essential sense, in that “both the society as a whole and the system of government were organized on the principle of freedom of choice” (p.8). The second way liberal-democracy is a double system of power is that it exerts a system that regulates the interactions between people based on the property rights claims they have

on each other - more specifically through the rights that people have to own the means of production and thus the conditions of employment. This system functions to fuel capitalist needs by keeping the market economy working to reach the greatest possible level of productivity.

Capitalism cannot work unless a few individuals have enough capital to own the means of production, while the majority do not, and must sell their labour to others instead. While in theory a liberal democracy gives even those who sell their labour free choice by selling their labour for the highest wage they can acquire. Macpherson argues that by selling their labour individuals transfer some of their power to the owners of production. This is because in order for an individual to exert their capacity to labour, in other words to use their strength and skills, they must have the ability or opportunity to do so within the market. Thus, an individual transfers some of her or his power to make a choice about where they sell their labour to the owners of production (Macpherson, 1965). He states that in this system everyone is free, but some (the owners of production) are freer than others (labourers) (Macpherson, 1965).

Selling one's labour becomes an imperative in a neo-liberal society where wealth is not only synonymous with power, but is also linked with personal safety, wellbeing, and worth. Wealth at all costs is the dominant discourse in our society and, as will be illustrated by structural social work theory, is permeated through society by its institutions to a degree where it is taken as common sense or human nature.

This framework is useful when talking about migration. While youth in Nova Scotia have free choice in some ways - to choose their occupation, their education, and where to

live - they are powerless because these decisions are bound either by their ability to own the means of producing capital or by where they can sell their labour. Also, if we adopt Macpherson's perspective, we need to consider how the liberal-democratic government plays a role in enforcing this power dynamic through the dual system of power it exercises largely through property rights. This is an important dynamic to understand when working from a structural perspective (Carniol, 1992; Moreau, 1990) and from the perspective of rural social work (Collier, 2006; Pugh and Cheers, 2010).

3.2 Structural social work

The overarching lens that encompasses my work is structural social work. As a method of professional social work practice structural social work is "profoundly influenced by a society's economic and political forces" (Carniol, 1992, p.2). At the core of this theory and practice model is the idea that certain societies produce systemic inequalities that are rooted in the structures of capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, race and other oppressions. Structural social work can be seen as an "umbrella" that covers major radical themes in social work such as feminist, Marxist, and anti-oppression theories (Carniol, 1992; Mullaly, 2007; Hicks & Murray, 2009). By looking at it in this way we move past pitting one category of oppression over the other and treat them all as being woven together (Moreau, 1990; Carniol, 1992; Mullaly, 2007), or as described by Mullaly (1997) "the structural approach views various forms of oppression as intersecting with each other at numerous points, creating a total system of oppression" (p.105). Structural social work understands that individuals, groups, and families may live under multiple oppressions throughout their lives (Mullaly, 2007, Hicks & Murray, 2009).

Structural social work rests on the assumption that one group in our society maximizes its power by creating situations and structures that minimize another group's ability to gain resources and improve their life's circumstances (Wineman, 1984). The current manifestation of this is neoliberal capitalism. Bob Mullaly (1997) explains how society rests on a dominant ideology (neoliberal capitalism), which is transferred to individuals through socialization. Once this dominant ideology is learned and internalized by individuals through socialization, it dictates the nature of society's institutions and the social and economic relations between people and groups. Structural social work practice then targets or challenges society at three different levels: challenging the dominant ideology, the social and economic institutions and the social and economic relations (Mullaly, 1997). Mullaly (1997) states "the term 'structural' in social work is both descriptive and prescriptive. It is descriptive in the sense that the major source of social problems is described as being located in the way our society is *structured*. It is prescriptive in the sense that because social problems are rooted in our social structure, then the *structures* must be changed, not the individual" (p.134).

Structural social work differs from mainstream social work, which relies mainly on a medical model derivatives to explain individual struggles. In the medical model a person's difficulties are seen as personal and internal and "treatment" takes the form of changing the behaviour of the individual. For example, if a person is living in poverty the medical model would explore what behaviour or attributes keep an individual from getting work; such as their lack of skills or their lack of motivation to engage in labour. In contrast, the structural model would look foremost at the structural barriers within the structures of society that keep the individual in poverty. This could include stereotypes

related to race, gender, and ability as well as economic situations that may make work hard to come by because of the economic situations such as the need for capitalism to have surplus labour that would make work hard to attain or deliberately in short supply.

Oppression in its various forms is reflected in the state by those who have power and wish to maintain it (Carniol, 1992; Moreau, 1990). As it pertains to my research, Pugh and Cheers (2010) state that the influence of power, while mainly located in urban areas, is strongly felt in the rural context. The priority of structural social work is to contribute to the transformation of society in order to achieve the emancipation of those who are oppressed by the dominant ideology of the society (Mullaly, 1997). This transformation can only be achieved through targeting the dominant ideology at the different levels of society, sub-structurally institutionally, and within social relations (Mullaly, 1997).

Moreau outlines two interrelated roles upon which structural social workers base their practice. The first focuses on the sociopolitical and economic factors to which individuals are socialized and embody the collective nature of oppression (Moreau, 1990). The second role is to work with clients to create a consciousness that is able to understand and acknowledge these forces and to eliminate self-blame and internalized oppression (Moreau, 1990). In this way, structural social workers follow the feminist creed that the “personal is political” (Hicks & Murray, 2009) and seek to draw links between the everyday struggles of people and the socio-political institutionalized systems that perpetuate those struggles.

Hicks and Murray (2009) explain that “structural social work takes a ‘dialectical’ approach, seeing ‘individuals’ agency’ and ‘social structures’ as related, co-existing constructs engaged in a mutually reinforcing relationship where one organizes and perpetuates the other “(p.89). The dialectical nature of structural social work theory marries modernism and post-modernism (Mullaly, 1997). Simply put, modernism in critical social theory is interested in universal truths and the shared experience of oppression while post modernism explores the individual experience and difference in oppression, including regional difference (Mullaly, 1997). Structural social work sees both interests as being important to the analysis of society and social work practice. Mullaly (1997) states, “a dialectical analysis helps one to see the world as possessing some universal truths (eg. the nature of capitalism, oppression of subordinate groups) but with different people in different localities with different ethnicities, social positions, and so on experiencing universal phenomenon differently.” (p.128). This analysis connects the personal with the political in ways that would not be possible with only a modernist or post-modernist perspective alone (Mullaly, 1997). Mullaly (1997) continues “Without a dialectical analysis, the temptation would be to opt for either modernism or post-modernism as a perspective on which to base one’s critical theory. This would, of course, result in the potential contributions of one or the other being omitted, which in turn would render a disservice to those suffering exploitation and subordination” (p.128).

The aim of this present study is to explore the issues that young people from rural communities experience as they move forward into careers and other life experiences. These issues may not be completely different from young people in urban areas, with

forces such as capitalism at play, however what makes the outward migration of rural youth of interest is the way that these forces interact with local circumstances that create experiences for rural individuals that are different from people living in urban contexts. The dialectical approach of structural social work is therefore very useful to the analysis in this study. These differences in rural and urban contexts can be further understood by examining rural social work literature.

3.2.1 Rural social work through a structural lens

Since social work is a product of urban industrialization (Collier, 2006) it is important to understand its applicability as a means of understanding and supporting rural communities. In one of the most widely-used Canadian texts on rural social work Ken Collier (2006) suggests that social workers need to understand the necessity of connecting broader political and economic systems in their work with rural people. An analysis of rural social work literature demonstrates the applicability of a structural approach in rural areas. In *Rural social work: An international perspective* (2010) Pugh and Cheers offer five dimensions to help social workers understand and work with rural communities in the western world: geography, demography, economy, and political-structural dimensions. Although advocating a generalist social work approach, and not explicitly a structural one, these dimensions demonstrate that rural social work needs to situate the client-worker experience in the context of the political and economic system of the community and region. Although geography and demography obviously play a role in how communities are organized, it is through the economic, political-structural dimensions that one can see the important connection to structural social work.

The economic dimension of rural social work is concerned with labour market issues, the introduction of migrant workers into many rural communities, and the changing nature of industry in rural regions (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). Within the political-structural dimension Pugh and Cheers encourage rural social workers to consider the ways that centralized government limits political power in remote and rural communities. This impacts the control rural people have over their natural resources and labour.

Collier (2006) argues that the struggles faced by rural communities are based on an industrial society's need to centralize human labour in order to create a work force for capitalist ventures. Centralizing people, or in other words creating urban centers, requires rural people to adapt their way of life to fit cohesively into the capitalist frame which demands organized and mobile labour.

These examples demonstrate just a few ways that structural social work is important in the rural context. The importance of connecting the personal with the political in a rural context is clear, and my research hopefully expands on that connection.

3.3 Chapter three: Conclusion

Political economy and structural social work theory form the theoretical context of this paper and are used to understand and analyze the information given by participants. In later chapters I utilize these theories in response to the lived experiences of participants to form discussion around rural youth mentorship and education, the way returners are seen as failures by some in the community, and other issues that arise from the interview data. I also use the dialectical approach of structural social work to aid in understanding the ways growing up in rural and urban environments can be drastically different, even in the face of similar issues.

4. Chapter Four: Methodology

To answer the research question I collected data in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley through one on one interviews with young adults (ages 20-30). I focused on the jurisdiction of the local high school, which I attended from 2001 until 2006. This community has a few distinct advantages for this study. The first is its location in an area that encompasses many different "types" of rurality (Statistics Canada, 2011a; Pugh and Cheers, 2010; OECD, 1994). Youth travel to the school by bus from almost an hour away in each direction, some coming from the town of Kentville and some coming from more isolated areas on the North Mountain. This location provides an ideal way to incorporate into my research the various perspectives of what is defined by government and academic groups as "rural".

The area also has an interesting economic history. A hot spot for farming, fishing, and ship-building in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it then became a stronghold for vegetable and meat processing through the 1960s to early 1990s as described in the introduction to this thesis. The area was an important connection point between the Annapolis Valley and the rest of the province. However, like many in the Maritimes, these industries were affected by globalization, industrial agriculture, and the decline of the fisheries. Because this economic history is similar to many Maritime communities it will enable this research to be useful for other communities and researchers.

4.1 Research as an insider in a rural community: Benefits and challenges

The final reason I chose this community is because it is my home community. My familiarity with the community has made it easier to identify possible research partners -

including the school board, local government, and other stakeholders – who were able to help me with recruitment, a space for interviews and community buy-in. Also, when this project is completed these groups may also play a role in further political or community consciousness raising.

Literature on the topic of rural research as well as my own experience with this project has shown that being an “insider” within the community may open doors to deepen the research that might not be available to an “outsider” whose only tie to the community is research.

Cohen (1982) found that belonging to a place involves more than geographic location. It also involves kinship, beliefs, friendships, and other networks. Although I have not lived in the community any longer than eight months in the last seven years, I still have family, friendships and community ties that I nurture. Pugh and Cheers (2010) state that an outsider may not be able to see the “real” community for two reasons: first, an outsider may already have an image of the community before they enter it. The way society holds idyllic ideas about rural life, or other stereotypes of a slow or non-intellectual society, might contribute to building a bias that is hard to break. Another way that it might be difficult for an outside researcher to get a complete idea of the community is that her presence may limit some aspects of the social life of the community (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). In other words, the community at large might be on its “best behaviour” because it wants to paint a particular picture of the area. Pugh and Cheers suspect this also impacts the way people talk to each other, suggesting that what some people tell themselves and others about the community may not be a complete picture, because the notion of community serves a different purpose in a rural setting.

There may also be pressure from the community to paint the village or organizations in a particular way and I will need to be cognizant of this as further action is planned as a result of this project. For example, my research question involves considering how professionals in the community work with youth to support them in making choices about their future and because the community is so small there are so few professionals in the area. Therefore any negative or positive attributions can be easily linked to individuals in the community. Balancing this concern with presenting the true experiences of the participants of this study has been key throughout this study. As an insider I needed to be aware of how I can also be influenced by these issues and it has been an important part of my analysis to be reflexive in my interpretation of the data and as I continued to move forward the project.

Much of the research on rural social work explores the dual role of the social worker in a rural area (Pugh, 2003; Collier, 2006; Pugh and Cheers, 2010; Ginsberg, 2011). Although comments are not made about research specifically, links can be made between the “practicing social worker” and the “social work researcher” in this context. For example, residents of rural communities often need to “place” people in relation to others in the community, family connections, and location (Pugh and Cheers, 2010; Ginsberg, 2011). For me, this meant that participants almost always asked about the health and activities of my family and our mutual friends. Every person that I spoke to as a participant has known me since early high school if not as far back as preschool. I had to be constantly aware of the connections I have to the research participants, which may have served as a way to gain trust as a researcher, but may also have made research participants hesitant to take part or to feel pressure to report their experiences in a certain

way. Rural social workers are often expected to be less formal with their clients and this impacted my interviews as the specific questions in interviews were often interrupted with local gossip or questions put to me about my other relationships and activities. The participants of this study were also able to observe me formally within the interviews as well as informally at the local pub or at the bridal shower of a mutual friend.

Being an insider I believe has been an asset to this project; however, I still had concerns throughout about upholding the principles of ethical social work research. The primary way that I achieved this was through the consent form that was signed by each participant before the interview, see Appendix B. Within the consent form and also in my interactions with participants I tried to be clear that I would not speak to anyone about their participation in the research, their responses to questions, or their specific experiences as reported to me. I also expected participants and others in the community to have conversations about me and the research, which I encouraged as it helped to spread the word about the study and the issue of the outward migration of youth. Pugh and Cheers (2010) observe that this type of talk plays an important role in deciding whether or not to accept someone or their ideas in the community. Especially within the advisory committee, it was important to set clear boundaries about what should be shared outside the group. For example, it was agreed that comments made by specific committee members would not be shared, but the status of the research, any funding we receive and perhaps even my actions within the group would be fair conversation pieces.

4.2 Participatory action research

In as many ways as possible I strove to take a Participatory Action Research (P.A.R.) approach to this project. P.A.R. is defined by Van de Sande and Schwartz

(2011) as “empowering communities by actively involving the people affected by the research in all phases of the research” (p.30). The purpose of this method is to involve participants and community members in order to empower them through their own experiences. It also offers a platform for community-wide discussion and action on a particular issue identified by its members (Van de Sande and Schwartz, 2011).

There are several methods that can be used within P.A.R., and various degrees to which community involvement can be sought. It often involves the use of a research advisory committee, which works with the researcher throughout the process of constructing interview questions; methodology within the interviews, participant recruitment, and community involvement.

In the beginning of this project I proposed to work with students of the local high school as my primary informants and advisory committee. The study was to include focus groups of students in grade eleven and twelve, a focus group of guidance counselors from the local high school, and a focus group made up of adult allies to be identified by the students. However, due to the busy nature of the final months of the school year my request to work within the high school was denied in the final stages of the school board ethics process. At this point the project had to be reimagined in order to be completed. To do this I created an advisory committee made up of two young adults and a youth who was in grade twelve at the time.

I first looked for advisory committee members by contacting individuals with whom I had remained in contact with since leaving high school. As my research will show, this topic is one that is near to the hearts of many people that I grew up with and is often a

topic of conversation when my high school friends and acquaintances get together. I initially contacted three people with whom I had graduated with who had already expressed an interest in my research topic of outward migration. Of these three people, one person was in the Valley and able to participate. I extended an invitation another young person who was in The Valley for the summer, and has an academic interest in community development and research. Finally, the third member of the advisory committee is a young woman who was in her final year of high school at the time. Whom I knew was interested in pursuing post-secondary education and I felt this might be a good opportunity for her to take part in social science research.

When choosing members for the advisory committee I tried to both cast a wide net and also ensure that taking part in the committee would be beneficial to potential members. In Chapter Six of this thesis additional reasons for participating are explained by advisory committee members themselves. While other individuals were approached, including some older adults, however the timing of the research made it difficult for them to participate. Many of the same barriers to participation in the advisory committee were similar to those faced by participants of the study.

Together with this advisory committee it was decided that much of the information that was to be originally gathered through the various focus groups could be gained from doing one-on-one interviews with young adults, ages 20- 30 years who had graduated from the local high school. This choice was made for several reasons. The first was that because of the need to reorganize the project our timeline was significantly shorter than what was originally intended, making it difficult to recruit participants and hold the focus

groups. Also because of the time of year graduation ceremonies, summer vacation, and local farm work made it difficult for students and adults involved in the school to take part in the study. However, the most interesting factor in this decision and in the work of the advisory committee centered on how the voices of adults and professionals who work with youth are often privileged over the experiences of young people themselves. As we continued to discuss this it became clear that there was a strong interest by the young adults we knew to talk about their experiences of migration from the Valley. We therefore decided that one-on-one interviews would take place with these individuals and with the use of Skype and other technologies it would be possible for me to interview people who were living in the Valley as well as in other parts of the country.

The committee met in person twice throughout the project and we have had various conversations over Facebook and Skype. The first meeting was to make the final decision about the method to be used as described above and in more depth further in this chapter. At that point we also discussed ideas about the topics and questions that should be covered within the interviews which related to our own experiences of making choices after high school and our current feelings about migration. In order to finalize our questions I met with the two young adult members on separate occasions to discuss the questions that I had begun to formulate based on the research I had reviewed, conversations within the advisory committee, and talking with other young adults in the community. Although it would have been preferable to do this work together as a group our short time line and community events such as the high school graduation week made it impossible to do so and still complete the interviews within the required timeline, more

discussion on this can be found in Chapter Six. These one-on-one meetings as well as discussions and the approval of the questions over private messaging on Facebook resulted in our final interview questions which can be found in Appendix A. Our final meeting was held after the final interview was completed and I was able to give the group a final report on how the interviews went, some of the themes I was starting to see from the data, and to have a conversation on what we would like to see happen with this project in terms of community and political action. A more in-depth discussion of this conversation can be found in Chapter Six.

There were various limitations to my ability to fully embrace P.A.R. within this research. The first is due to the nature of the MSW thesis process which places the ethical onus and other responsibilities on me and my supervisor. It is important to note that my supervisor has never been to this area and has no connection to the people there, which strays from the P.A.R. philosophy. Ideally, a P.A.R. project would be initiated and supervised by community members, not an outside body. Also, because this work is done with the hope that I will receive an MSW degree for my work, I have a vested interest that is separate from that of the community's. A more in-depth discussion on the limitations of this study can be found in Chapter Six.

Another limitation is that I was only in the area for two months. This restricted the amount of feedback I was able to receive from the advisory committee in the initial stages (such as the original proposal) and the final decisions about how to analyse and present the data. In addition to the completion of the thesis, I will endeavour to consult members of the advisory committee about any further publication of the results. Some

ideas and strategies have already been discussed and these will be presented in Chapter six. It is also important to note that using technologies such as Skype and Facebook have been important tools in our organization and in my ability to continue to seek guidance from the advisory committee now that I am back in Ottawa and as its members return to school or work.

When using a P.A.R. approach it is important to consider how the research might be useful to the community and to those affected by outward migration. The first way is that it raises the awareness of the community and participating individuals about the issue (in this case the reasons why youth are leaving or staying in the community) (Van de Sande & Schwartz, 2011). It is my hope that this project will go further, making a mark on the AVRSB and starting discussions within the board about how the issues raised by the results of this project impact the choices high school students make about their futures. I also think this work could impact municipal governments and their investment in local youth, as well as the Nova Scotia provincial government and its interest in rural issues expressed through the Department of Community and Rural Development (Province of Nova Scotia, 2012). Specific plans for action will be discussed in Chapter Six.

4.3 Participants and recruitment methods

As stated above, the advisory committee and I decided that individuals between the ages of 20 and 30 and who had attended high school at Northeast Education Centre would be recruited to take part in the study. This age group was chosen because it would enable me, the interviewer to gather data from participants who had experienced

migration decisions at different points in time, for example when finishing high school and in young adulthood when starting a family and job prospects become important. Also, this young adult participants may serve as adult allies to other young people in the community and may seek advice from adult allies themselves on issues of migration.

Recruitment took place through word of mouth by myself and the advisory committee members. We approached people who we felt had a breadth of experience with migration (stayers, leavers, and returners), people from different genders, and people of different ages within the 20-30 age range. We also tried to identify people from different communities within the high school catchment area, for example people from the village, the countryside and the more urban town. Because we also had access to Skype we were able to include people who were living in different parts of Canada in our recruitment strategy. As an advisory committee we brainstormed about specific people that we knew who were interested in the topic. This included some of the individuals who were approached initially to be part of the advisory committee because of their interest in the topic, but were not able to take part. Our goal, as stipulated by my thesis supervisor, was to interview five to eight individuals.

Individuals were initially contacted informally by myself or by a member of the advisory committee, usually over Facebook or in person. Once the initial contact was successfully made, a more formal invitation together with a copy of the consent form was sent to each participant.

Eight interviews were completed over the period of two weeks in the Valley. All of the participants were known to me because we attended the same high school,

although many of the participants did not graduate in my class. Some of the participants are related to me⁸ and others are friends. Five women and two men took part. Both of the male participants were considered to be leavers and grew up in Town. It is important to note that there were men in the community (stayers) who were interested in taking part, however the timing of the interview coincided with the two hottest and driest weeks of the summer, therefore occupying many young farm workers with getting in hay. This in conjunction with the busy end of school season speaks to the importance of community involvement in the creation of research that is difficult to achieve when working from physically outside the community as well as under the constraints of the university calendar.

The research participants represent a variety of migration classifications (Table 2) and levels of rurality (Table 3) as described in the tables below.

Table 2: Number of participants based on migration classification

Classification	Number of participants
Stayers	2
Leavers	4
Returners	2

Table 3: Number of participants based on home community

Area⁹	Number of participants
Town	3
Village	2
Mountain	3

⁸ This is unavoidable in such as small town. Had I eliminated people who were related to me it would have significantly affected the sample size that was possible for this study.

⁹ As described by the participant as the place they lived growing up in the Valley. See Chapter Two, the literature review for a more specific definitions of “town”, “village” and “Mountain”.

Other important characteristics of the participant group is that there were two mothers, five people with either a degree or some university education (including three people who are presently in school), and two individuals who have lived or are currently living in Alberta.

4.4 Data analysis method

The data analysis was done using NVivo software purchased from Carleton University. The first set of coding was done during the process of transcription which involved coding the sections as well as the specific questions. An analysis of the responses to each question was then conducted to see the differences and commonalities between answers. Throughout this processes I paid specific attention to themes around responses from stayers, leavers, and returners, as well as themes found within genders and hometowns.

Once this first stage was completed, responses where then coded again to reflect themes which arose in response to various questions throughout the interviews. These themes are discussed in great detail in Chapter Six.

Finally, the advisory committee has been given opportunities to review this document and comment on areas that they feel are important. Their final suggestions will be added pending my approval.

5. Chapter Five: Findings

The findings of this study are presented in the following chapter and are organized based on the four sections of the interview questionnaire. At the beginning of each section I offer a brief overview of the main findings for that section. Each individual question is then stated and the responses are shown based on the themes of the responses. I also offer some connections to the literature and brief discussions on certain issues or topics that arise.

Overall, the volume of the findings for this study reflects the breadth and variety of questions that were asked in order to fill in some of the gap in the literature on rural youth migration. Very few trends were found between people with varying migration experiences. For example, there were very few instances when all of the stayers answered a question in the same way. Although there were only two male participants, their responses were often similar.

Participants stated that, when they were leaving high school, they did not fully understand the implications of staying or leaving. For leavers and returners the need to “escape” or “explore” theme was given as the main reason for migration after high school. “Escape” and “explore” were also reasons that leavers continue to live outside of the Valley.

Another theme that was present throughout the interviews was that participants were not satisfied with the advice and support that they received from adults when they were finishing high school. Participants also stated that they felt that there were many different stereotypes held by the community about youth who stay, leave, and return. Many felt that the community overall could do more to support youth who may want to stay in or return to the Valley. Almost all of the participants told me that the choice to stay in or leave the Valley is one that they constantly think about and that this choice continues to be an emotional one as they age through adulthood.

5.1 Section one: Past factors of migration

The purpose of this section of the interview was to gain information about the choices participants made when they were finishing high school and/or were seventeen to eighteen years old. Some participants struggled with this section because it involved thinking back upwards of ten years for some participants. However, the findings recount the struggles of making choices about migration in spite of the time passed.

A few overall themes emerged within this question. The first is that many participants identified the same issue or factor, yet used it in different ways. For example, one participant reported that they hated the fact their home community was “small” because this meant that people would gossip about youth and their private lives, while another said that she liked the small community because it allowed her to network and find resources in the community to do what they wanted to do. This theme brought to mind the expression “one person’s trash is another person’s treasure” in that what is desirable for one person might not be for another. This raises an important point: migration desires, residential preferences and an individual’s goals are unique and fluid, therefore what is good for one person may not be good for another and this must impact the way we give advice about and acceptance of individual migration choices.

A second theme that arose from the questions in Section One was that participants reported not being able to understand the long term effects of their migration choices when they were finishing high school. Many participants told me that they were not even thinking about what it meant to move away or to stay in the Valley for the long term. Many participants also said that they did not fully understand the impact of the other choices they were making at the time such as what program to take in school, whether or

not university was the right fit, or the ways in which their relationships would be affected as they moved on to other things in life.

Another issue that was presented in this section, and continues throughout the findings of this study, is the difficulty in differentiating the issues unique to growing up rural, or issues that arise for all youth and young adults regardless of location. For example, the notion of exploring the world outside of one's hometown is not something that is unique to a rural setting. Individuals who grow up in the city may also feel compelled to see new places and experience new things. As will be explored in the discussion chapter of this work, the experience of growing up rural adds unique flavours and perspectives to growing up. Pugh and Cheers (2010) describe a similar idea in relation to rural social work: it is often not the issues that social workers face in rural communities that are different, but the way they are experienced by rural people that creates difference in practice. So it may be for rural youth as well.

Finally, throughout this section a few key terms arise that are linked to leaving for the participants of this study. "Explore", "escape" and "just knowing" seem linked together for youth who want to leave. "Explore" and "escape", although different, point to the idea that young people believe that there are things in the world that are better and worth setting out to discover. Although the idea of exploration is something that I feel should be encouraged, the idea of escape is something that implies ideas of oppression, stealth, and even fear. Although this is not necessarily how "escape" is described by participants of this study, more exploration of this idea would be beneficial to supporting youth retention and return to rural communities.

The idea of “just knowing” is linked to leavers who reported that they could not really think of a time when they saw themselves living in the Valley. In this study this feeling was often also part of the conversation held with participants who described “explore” and “escape” themes. What it meant for the participants was that, when they were finishing high school and thinking about their future schooling and careers the question of “should I stay or should I go” was not one that they asked themselves.

5.1.1 Question one: Describe your community as you would have known it when you were finishing high school.

Think about the physical description, the people, and the way you felt about being a young person in that particular community. Prompt: Could you also talk about the opportunities that youth had to find work or take part in recreation?

The aim of this question was to understand how participants saw their community when they were finishing high school and the opportunities they saw for themselves there. In response to this question most participants stated outright that they had felt the area was beautiful. This was a theme throughout the interview, with many participants describing the scenery and how they appreciated the physical environment.

Both of the male responders gave the most detailed negative descriptions of the area, specifically about disliking the way of life and how they weren’t able to picture themselves living there after high school. Although it could have been expected that stayers and returners may have had a more positive view of the Valley when they were finishing high school, this was not the case for the participants in this study.

5.1.1.1 “Small”

Most people described the community with the word “small”. This was not necessarily used to describe something they liked or disliked about the community, nor the physical size of the community, but how people in the community intersect and relate to each other. It also did not seem to matter if the individual was from the village or the

*“When I was 18 I think everyone saw [the Village] as a small place that they were excited to get out of”
(Stayer, female)*

larger town, “small” in terms of knowing those around you was still a defining feature for them:

“[Canning is] really small. You know what’s going on everywhere as opposed to bigger areas where you wouldn’t know if something happened or that kind of stuff. So, it’s really little” (Leaver, female).

“I would have described it as small, Kentville being my community. Sort of everyone knows everyone, or if you don’t know someone you are only one or two steps removed from them” (Leaver, male)

5.1.1.2 Isolated

The idea of being isolated was also a common way that participants described the community. One participant described this isolation in terms of culture and events by saying that

“I think the reason I wanted to [leave] so badly is because I felt trapped, both by the people and also by the physical location. Because the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia is, or the way I thought it was back then, is a small place that is so far away from anything. I mean, I would hear about concerts and events that would be going on in Montreal or Toronto

and New York. None of that stuff ever came around to Halifax, let alone the Valley” (Leaver, male).

Another participant echoed this feeling stating that “[it was] frustrating in you are far away from major things going on in the rest of the world. Our biggest news center is in Halifax and we are an hour and a half away” (Leaver, female).

Another interesting way that isolation was described was by one participant who felt that her connections in her small community could not be transferred to other places as they could if you were growing up in a more urban area:

“The connections that you make and the people that you meet, although they are really great connections, it doesn’t enable you to continue broader connections so much when you leave” (Leaver, female)

For example, a young person in a city might have access to volunteer opportunities in large organizations, such as the John Howard Society or the YMCA. While some of these services are available in rural communities, it is far more likely that small local organizations provide the majority of volunteer opportunities. The credibility and networking opportunities in a larger organization is much different than that of a small community who is not known outside of the community.

5.1.1.3 Community belonging and gossip

Another theme the participants brought to light within their community descriptions was different feelings of community involvement or integration. This was used as both a negative and a positive descriptor of the community. Similar to the idea that the community was “small” because everyone knows everyone, this was also used to describe the community in a negative way: “In high school everyone would know and everyone would talk... people knew everything about you” (Stayer, female) and “the only frustration was that everyone knew everyone” (Leaver, female).

Another participant also described how community belonging could be a negative factor in this community and how this in turn made her think about migrating to other places:

“I felt very out of touch with the community, like it didn’t fit... I just felt like an outcast. I had a few friends but I didn’t really hang out with them. I dunno. I guess I always just thought that there was more out there. That I would jive better with my personality and stuff” (Returner, female)

In contrast, for some participants this was used to describe a more positive aspect of the community in that, as a youth, it was easy to find help and resources when needed:

“When I was leaving high school the really small community where I grew up was becoming more community oriented and having functions and I felt really positively about that and that was something I have enjoyed coming back to and returning home to be part of that. The community in high school wasn’t frustrating because all you had to do was ask. So if you wanted to do something in the community or better the community you just had to ask and you had resources. You knew people” (Leaver, female)

5.1.1.4 Activities

Although I had thought that this would be used as more of a descriptor for this rural area, activities or lack of activities was not used as often as I expected. Participants that used this in their descriptions said that there was both lots to do and nothing to do:

“Canning itself was just kind of a spot that we were, it was kind of a dead town and if we wanted to do anything we would leave Canning to do it”

(Stayer, female)

“It was fun. I had a lot of fun. There was always things to do. The same things I still do. Swimming, camping, parties. There’s lots of adventure and exploring. I was always outdoors doing stuff, it didn’t matter what season” (Returner, female)

Perhaps this can be examined in two ways. The first is the notion that different people want and live different lifestyles. It is also interesting to examine these responses in terms of the rural idyll and other stereotypes attached to rural living. Both the idyllic rural scenes of being outdoors and enjoying a friendly community and the not so flattering idea of a boring, backward place both appear in these descriptions. Like any place, this rural town obviously has elements of both the exciting and slow, yet cannot be fully described by either. What is interesting to this study is the way these two conceptions of rural are used to the favor or detriment of a community and when thinking about rural migration.

5.1.1.5 Perceived way of life

Three participants also used “way of life” as a descriptor for what they saw in the community when they were 18 years old. For example, “Traditional is probably the wrong word for it, but kind of set with a method or a lifestyle that has been that way for a while and everyone is pretty content with that” (Leaver, male). Both of the male participants described the way of life in the Valley in a more negative sense. In one interview a participant explained this in a very frank way:

Participant: “Again I keep going back to when I was 18 and thinking ‘what a terrible thing to say’, but this is what 18 year old me had in my head. “ I think I looked around me and saw a lot of people who I felt were just sort of stuck in an endless cycle of not becoming the best people they could be and I kind of felt like that was somehow linked to growing up in the Valley. Somehow growing up in the Valley created an attitude in people where they would sort of stagnate and become stale and not reach for anything more and I felt like, were I to stay there, then that sort of thing would happen to me. And that was terrifying” (Leaver, male)

“Way of life” was also used in a more positive or idyllic sense to describe the Valley area. One participant stated that she remembers thinking that “Canning in particular is very small, very rural. Lots of fields and farmers and people who are using their hands in the labour force. People who are very hard working” (Leaver, female)

5.1.1.6 Opportunities for youth

The final piece of this first question was to explore specifically what opportunities in the area that these participants felt they had at the time of high school graduation. Only seven of the eight interviews touched specifically on this question and four of the responders stated that they did not see opportunities in the area for youth when they were 18 years old. For example, one participant stated “Pretty sure I said to myself many times

“Yeah, I never really explored them. But I feel like there were more opportunities then than there are now” (Returner, female)

that there is nothing here for me” (Leaver, male). It is interesting to note that all four of these participants left the area right after high school, with only one person

returning later. Both male participants fell into this group. It was also common in the interviews for participants to describe the opportunities for youth in relation to other more urban areas by saying something such as “there aren’t necessarily as many opportunities here as there are in bigger communities or cities” (Leaver, female). Three participants remember feeling as though there were opportunities for youth in the Valley area when they were finishing high school.

Within this group there was a stayer, a leaver, and a returner. I had expected that people who had a more favorable perception of the opportunities available to youth would be stayers or returners. This

Interviewer: “So no opportunities for youth?”

Participant: “No, not at all. I thought that if I even wanted to be something more than a Michelin factory worker I would have to leave” (Leaver, male)

expectation was held in part because Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) found that youth who were most likely to leave felt that there were more opportunities outside of their rural community. This expectation may be supported as the leaver in the group does plan

on someday returning to the Valley. These individuals saw how already being connected to the community could make other opportunities more available. For example one participant felt that, because she already had work in the village, it may have made it easier for her to see opportunities or to feel as though there were opportunities available to youth at the time. Another young woman also pointed out that socioeconomic status also played a role in the opportunities she saw for youth when she was leaving high school. In response to my question she said, “Yes, I would say [that I saw opportunities]. And I think they were limited to a certain type of youth as well” She went on to say:

“You had to want to make [things] happen, so there would be a certain type of student or person with a certain type of family that would be enabled to be involved with the community because, I guess it’s like anywhere, certain children become privileged with what they are able to do. It costs money to be in drama or sports... then a certain type of youth can only be so involved and have the opportunities” (Leaver, female)

5.1.2 Question two: What were your plans for the future at that point?

This question was added to the interview for a few reasons, the first being that finding out where the participants were headed after high school added context to the interview. Also, this question was meant to shed some light on what plans were valuable and important to youth when they were leaving high school. For this group it is clear that going to university, as well as moving away were valued objectives for after high school.

Three participants were planning on staying in the Valley to pursue various activities including continuing with school and working. This group includes both stayers and one of the participants categorized as a returner. Of the five people who were planning on leaving four of them were leaving to attend university, two of whom were attending in Halifax. Of the eight participants who responded to this question, only two stated that they were not planning on attending some sort of post-secondary education. These two individuals were planning on working and traveling. This information is shown in *Table 4* and *Table 5* below:

Table 4: Migration plans after high school

	Staying in the Valley	Leaving the Valley	
		Halifax	Outside of Halifax
Stayers	2		
Leavers		1	3
Returners	1	1	

Table 5: Life plans after high school

	Work	Post-secondary		Other
		University	Community College	
Stayers		1	1	
Leavers		3		1
Returners	1	1		

One theme that arose in this question was the idea that those who were attending university stated that they either stayed close to home or left based on the institution they wanted to attend, the helpfulness or responsiveness of the university, and how much scholarship money was offered to them instead of the location of the school. As stated by one participant: “it’s not so much why did I want to go to Sackville, but why I wanted to go to Mount Allison.” (Leaver, female). This will be discussed more in Section Two.

Why did this plan make sense to you at the time?

Four themes arose when participants spoke about why their plans made sense to them when they were leaving high school. Three people stated that their choices on where to go after high school meant that they would be “just far enough” away from home. One participant explained that “I didn’t want to be surrounded by all the same things I was surrounded in high school. I wanted to be a little ways away from my family, but not too far because I am really close to my family. Just far enough.” (Leaver, female). Two participants stated that university made sense to them because “at the time all the smart kids went to university” (Stayer, female) or because they felt a duty to family and friends to attend. Two people stated that they left the Valley because they wanted to explore and see new things. Finally, two people who stayed in the Valley right after high school stated that they weren’t sure why this made sense to them, or that they never really thought about anything else.

5.1.3 Question three: In your choice at that time to stay in the Valley or leave, what was the most important factor in your decision?

All reasoning for leaving or staying varied between the participants. However, four themes did arise.

A need to escape or explore

Although “explore” and “escape” are two different ideas, both of these factors focus on wanting to find something different outside one’s home town. All four of the leavers mentioned something along the lines of this theme, making it a very strong factor for people who left. Here are two example of this theme from the interviews:

Explore:

“Honestly, it was just what I wanted and I thought it was a good choice for me at the time. It was not the Valley, but it was still pretty close, kind of a way to step out and give it a try. It was a little experiment I guess.”

(Leaver, male)

Escape:

“The most important factor, in terms of what was driving me away? This escape idea. I think it was something more serious than a desire to see the world. I really felt like if I was ever going to grow as a person it was a necessity” (Leaver, male)

Another interesting piece of this idea was that some of the participants felt pressure from friends and family at the time to explore or escape the Valley. As stated by one participant: “I was afraid that I was just going to hang out with my high school friends and not get away from my family and people were going to say, oh gosh Acadia isn’t for you, go away, and get out of here.” (Leaver, female).

Small town feel

A mix of stayers, leavers, and returners all mentioned that wanting some sort of small town feel was important in their choices to either to stay in the Valley or to move to a place that had a similar atmosphere. For example, one leaver explained “one of [the factors] was I wanted to be in a place that reminded me of home and that was similar to home. I loved where I live and can appreciate that even more now” (Leaver, female). Although this individual has left the Valley, the idea of a small town rural community continued to be important to her.

Both of the stayers interviewed stated that this atmosphere was a key factor in their decision to stay:

“When you come from such a small place it’s a shock if you go anywhere else” (Stayer, female)

“I didn’t want to leave. I wasn’t ready to leave. I’m still not ready to leave” (Stayer, female)

These statements may speak to the sense of well-being that these individuals feel in the Valley. The quote highlighted in the text box above also speaks to this idea of safety and comfort in what is familiar.

“It was more than just one thing. It’s just the whole atmosphere. I just love it. The people, nature, my family and friends. Knowing all those little back roads and special spots. It’s just where I’m from and it’s my home” (Returner, female)

Being close to family

Being close to family was an important factor for both the stayers and returners as this was a primary factor for each of the four individuals when they were finishing high school. For the leavers as well it was important for a few of them that they did not move to a place that would be too far removed from their families. Those who ended up traveling to Halifax (both leavers and returners) said that this move allowed them to continue to be close to their families as many of their families still lived in the Valley or had also moved to Halifax.

Money

Only two participants mentioned money as an important factor in their decision making when they were finishing high school. Nevertheless, I felt that it is an important issue to consider. In the case of one participant scholarship money was one of the deciding factors to attend a university in a different part of the province. For another participant it was one of the deciding factors for him to remain in the province, although in Halifax. It was also mentioned that the low wages in many of the jobs that were available to young people in the rural area played a role in making the choice to leave at that point.

For many participants these reasons still have an impact on their choices, especially when it comes to staying or returning to the Valley. However, one participant stated that his reasons for leaving have changed because he feels the area itself has changed, making it more welcoming for him:

“I’m not sure if it is the Valley itself that has changed or my perception of the Valley that has changed. When I look at the Valley now I see it as a

place that has kind of put itself in a place between rural and urban. It is straddling those two lines. When I was eighteen it was, or it felt like, an area that was very isolated and kind of back water. Now when I come to it and I look around me it doesn't feel that way anymore” (Leaver, male)

5.1.4 Question 4: When you were making plans about the future were you concerned about the long-term results of leaving or staying in the Valley? In other words, was this even something that was on your mind?

“I don’t think I understood. Even now maybe I don’t really” (Leaver, male)
“I didn’t know it at the time, but it was a fairly defining thing, moving out of the Valley” (Returner, female)

All except one person stated that they did not understand the long-term consequences of migration. The participant that stated that she did understand the long term consequences was a person who, not only stayed in the community but, compared

to the other participants, grew up in the most rural part of the Valley. She also reported a high level of connectedness and integration with her small community in other parts of the interview. She described what she had felt would be the long-term consequences of her leaving:

“Yeah, you’re not going to see your family every day. You are going to have to talk to them over the phone, you can’t borrow the car. I’d just miss my family too much and it feels like I would be taken away from that dream of living as an adult.” (Stayer, female)

The other seven participants stated that they really did not understand what migration or staying would mean for them in the long term. One thing that several people

explained to me was that it wasn't something that crossed their minds because they were not focused on what was going to happen even in the not so distant future:

Participant: "No, not at all"

Interviewer: "What were you thinking about?"

Participant: "Just the right now" (Stayer, female)

One leaver also put it in another way:

"I remember telling my parents that I was going [away] and [they] were like, 'oh you are going to be far away' and I was like, 'Pft! I don't care! It will be awesome'. I really don't think I felt bad. I think that speaks to how much I felt like I needed to get away. I really don't feel like at that time there was much guilt [about leaving]" (Leaver, male)

Question four perhaps needs to be taken with some caution. When we think about young people in high school we need to keep in mind that cognitive development continues into young adulthood and this may impact how realistic it is to expect our youth to consider long-term consequences of something that obviously is not in the forefront of their minds. It is also important to consider that many youth who grew up in the Valley may have little experience with life outside the area, as will be shown in later questions. It is also difficult to understand how making the choice to move away from or stay in your home town has unique aspects for rural young people and how much is just a part of growing up that is experienced by youth no matter where they live. The quotes below speak to the challenge of moving away to university for one young woman. However, her statements may not be different from someone who grew up in an urban context:

“I don’t think I knew what I was headed for and I don’t think anyone really does, you think you are really prepared, you can learn to cook yourself and can save up all the money, and study really hard. But I don’t think anyone can actually know what they are doing”

“I don’t think I really knew what leaving felt like because I never had to do it. I’d been away before that, a little time traveling, but it’s normally with my family or a couple of days on my own. I never really thought about what it meant to leave my family or leave my community” (Leaver, female)

One participant identifies this issue very clearly:

“It wasn’t so much stress about leaving or staying, but stress about growing up. Trying to make choices and not knowing what you want to do and that kind of thing. That was stressful, but it wasn’t that big of a deal” (Returner, female)

The struggle that some young people have understanding the long-term consequences of their choices is a theme that presents itself throughout this work. A more in-depth discussion on this topic will happen in later chapters.

5.1.4 b The literature that I have read states that the choice to leave or stay creates a lot of internal conflict or stress for rural youth. Was this true for you?

A few participants noted that there were both stressful and not so stressful things about making choices about migration after high school. The individual quoted below had explained that the choice to leave was an easy one for him, one that required very

little thought and his family was very supportive. Nevertheless, issues with finances caused him stress:

“For me it was more financially stressful. I did not have the money to go to school. So I think that was more difficult than any social aspect. My family encouraged it, no one has ever gone that far in school in my family, so they were really glad I was [going away to school]. But it was more a financial stress than a social one for me” (Leaver, male)

However, most participants stated that the choice to leave or stay was not a stressful one for them and there was no difference in the reported stress levels of stayers, leavers, or returners. Overall, there were two things reported by the participants that apparently made this choice easier.

Not going far from home

Immediately after finishing high school only two of the participants travelled further than Halifax, with only one person leaving the province. For those people who remained in Nova Scotia it was said that not going too far made the choice easier. This was especially comforting for people who moved to Halifax. As one participant stated “When I was 18 I wasn’t thinking about going any further away than Halifax, so it wasn’t too stressful” (Returner, female). While the data from the interviews does not specifically explain why it was not a stressful choice for stayers, it is probable that remaining close to home was a less stressful option because it meant that they were close to family and in familiar surroundings.

“Just knowing”

Throughout the study there has been a theme of “just knowing” that the Valley wasn’t the place for some participants. Consequently, for some participants this “knowing” made the choice less stressful:

“I didn’t find it super stressful because I think for me there has always been something in the back of my head that has said I am not going to stay in the Valley” (Leaver, female)

“Growing up I didn’t think of any scenario in my mind where I was still here in the foreseeable future after school. It wasn’t calculated, it wasn’t that I decided I didn’t want to be there, I just can’t think of a time thinking that far ahead and still seeing myself there” (Leaver, male)

Only one participant stated that the initial decision about whether to stay or leave was very stressful for her.

“It was so stressful! It was really hard, especially when you have other people in your life who have this conceived notion, they think that they know you, well they do know you, and they think that ultimately at some point you want to get away and travel and experience different things than just your small town. But also you know how much you love your family and you know how much support they’ve given you, in my case at least. It’s a constant battle between staying and leaving... It’s huge deciding to leave.” (Leaver, female)

However, three people stated that what made the choice stressful for them were the other people involved in their lives. As shown in the quotes below this stress was mainly caused by other people pushing participants to pursue certain goals or the migration of people close to them:

“I think part of my thing was that everyone was telling me something different. Everyone. Although my parents were totally supportive of what I wanted to do. But of course they have their opinions and feelings which are important to me... Everyone has been settled here for so long, it’s like they expect other people to settle here right away” (Leaver, female)

Participant: “I think when most of my friends were leaving that was probably the most stressful part”

Interviewer: “What was stressful about other friends leaving?”

Participant: “I guess feeling that I was the only one that was going to be here and everyone else was going to be gone”

Interviewer: “Were you worried about being lonely?”

Participant: “Yes. I think that’s the main thing” (Stayer, female)

As discussed above, the difficulties of growing up were also mentioned as a response to this question. The time when a young person is finishing high school and moving on in life is a cause for pause, reflection, and in many cases this alone causes stress and anxiety.

5.1.4c Did these choices create any external conflict with friends or family at the time?

Five participants stated that their choices did not create any conflict with family or friends when they were moving on after high school. Some stated that their close family and friends understood that they needed to leave and supported their choice.

“I knew when I left high school that I wouldn’t see some of my friends and I wound up not seeing most of them. Which kind of sucked. No, I was fairly prepared to leave all of that” (Returner, female)

Other participants felt as though being separated from their high school friends was more like an evolution as they all moved on to other things. As shown in the quote below, there seemed to be some expectation at the point of finishing high school that these friendships would become less important:

“A lot of my friends that I had were leaving too...I didn’t think a lot of my friends would be my friends in five years” (Leaver, female)

Importantly, those who stayed after finishing high school stated that very little had changed with their friends and family compared to those who left after high school. This could be simply because staying in the area allowed them to maintain their close relationships, while those who left had to adjust their relationships to accommodate this change.

Two participants, both leavers, told me that their choices about migration did affect their relationships. One participant, as noted above, mentioned that feeling the push and pull from different family members and friends created many concerns for her. Similarly, another participant said that his family was just sad to see him go and did not understand his choice to leave.

“[My family] was as supportive as they could be, but I could tell they didn’t want me to go away. When I was 18 there was that sort of thing. I find now that every time I want to go away it’s a huge thing... It’s very hard because I almost sometimes feel like my parents aren’t supporting me. It’s hard to continue to make these choices when I know I’m disappointing them” (Leaver, male)

5.1.5 Question five: Where did you see yourself at 30 or 40?

Think specifically about the job, lifestyle, and residential preferences you had wanted for yourself back then.

The purpose of this question was to get an idea of what sort of lifestyle participants valued or wanted for themselves when they were eighteen. It will also be used later on for a brief comparison of what participants currently see themselves achieving or doing as they progress through adulthood.

Five people stated that when they were eighteen they saw themselves living somewhere urban. All four leavers and one returner stated that they saw themselves living away from the Valley and most stated that they saw themselves outside the province in an urban area or in the

suburbia of a major city such as Toronto.

“I never envisioned [my hometown]. I maybe envisioned Halifax. Halifax

most likely out of staying in the province, but outside of Halifax I couldn't really see myself staying in Nova Scotia” (Leaver, male)

Three participants stated that they saw themselves living in a rural area, but only one of them stated that they thought they would live in the Valley.

Only three participants spoke to this question in ways that relate specifically to the lifestyle they foresaw themselves having in the future when they finished high school.

Interviewer: “When you pictured yourself living somewhere in Europe, was it in a small town or a big city?”
Participant: “Definitely a big city. The biggest of cities.” (Leaver, male)

In response to my trying to clarify if one leaver wanted to live in an urban area because of the lifestyle he responded:

Participant: “I think it might have been. I’ve never really been about tractors or cows. I’ve always been more of a... sipping espresso on a street front or something like that has been more me. The rural lifestyle just didn’t seem to hook me” (Leaver, male)

Two of these individuals were male and also leavers. It could be that for these young men, living rural may have meant more specifically that they would need to participate in specific male dominated careers and patterns. The one individual who spoke in favor of the rural lifestyle is a stayer who lives in a more isolated part of the Valley

“That’s just where I wanted to live. I like driving out into the middle of nowhere and just living there... I’m not by myself. Just where there isn’t a lot of action. There’s not cars going by all the time” (Stayer, female)

5.2 Section Two: Current factors of migration

Seven participants answered the questions in Section Two. Due to time constraints one participant chose to skip this section so that Section Three and Four could be discussed. The goal of Section Two is to understand the path the participants have taken since high school and the way that they currently think about migration.

Overall, this section revealed some interesting insights on migration. It was found that participants did not regret the choices they made about migration when they were setting off after high school. However, it was reported that participants tend to think of these choices differently now and consider things such as their personal relationships more as they continue to make choices about migration. This section also made it clear that what people want in terms of lifestyle and residential preferences change over time. One way this is shown in this study is that many participants who wanted to live in an urban setting when they were eighteen now favor moving back to the Valley to settle down.

As in Section One, participants rarely answered questions in a binary way, most gave answers that highlighted both the negative and positive results of their migration choices. For example, most participants told me that there were both negative and positive changes in their relationships with their families due to their migration choices. It was also found that participants consider things like close relationships and lifestyle preferences more heavily when they are making migration choices now, as opposed to when they were finishing high school.

Another theme that ran through this set of questions was the way that leavers reported struggling with keeping close relationships with family and friends who remain

in the Valley. Participants reported ways that they feel misunderstood or pegged arrogant because of their experiences outside of the Valley.

Perhaps the most important finding from Section Two is that migration choices continue to be emotional for participants as they get older. Also, migration is a choice that is constantly on the minds of many participants, regardless of if they live in the Valley or away. Therefore, we should think of migration instead of a onetime choice, such as what university to attend, but instead as an ongoing process that happens throughout the lifetime, such as a career path.

5.2.1: Question one: You spoke a bit about the plans you had for your life when you were leaving high school. Can you tell me about the path you ended up taking in terms of school, work, and where you lived?

This question was included to gain some understanding of the path of the participant in order to inform the rest of the interview. Many of the short term plans of each participant were as they were planned. The longer term migration choices did have some variation for a few participants, but overall if a participant stated that they saw themselves living in an urban environment away from the Valley or if they saw themselves living in the Valley long term that is what took place.

More information on the current demographics of the participants can be found in the Methods chapter.

5.2.2 a Question two: If you had to make the choice again would you still stay in (or leave) the Valley?

All accept one person stated that they would make the same migration choices again. A leaver and a returner both stated that one of the reasons that they would do it all

again would be because their experiences of being away have helped them to have a greater appreciation being at home in the Valley and what is available here.

“It opened my eyes to how much I really love this place and how much I really want to live here” (Returner, female)

The one person who felt they would make a different choice about migration was a returner who felt as though she would have returned to an even more rural place in the Valley instead of the more dense community that she is currently in. This participant also stated that she thinks that if things in her personal life had gone differently then she would not have returned.

5.2.2 b What factors would you consider that you didn't think of before?

This question was difficult for some participants. As the interviews progressed I began rephrasing the question by asking participants what they would tell their eighteen year old selves about migration. It may not be advice to change their choice, but just something to consider, skip, or think about. Two main themes emerged within the responses to this question.

Relationships

Three people told me that they would tell themselves to consider their personal relationships. All of these individuals described different relationships. All of the people that mentioned this issue are leavers or have a close relationship with someone who is a leaver. One person stated that she would tell herself to reconsider which relationships she lets hold weight in her choice to migrate. Another participant stated that he would tell

himself to make more of an effort to stay in touch with those friends who stayed in the Valley:

Participant: “Now that you mention it though I think I would have made more of an effort to stay in touch with some people. There is a core that when we are all home we all get together and that is a really tightknit group, but there are some peripheral people that I’ve made less of an effort to stay in touch with that I regret. I think if I were still in the Valley those relationships would be stronger and now when I’m home on vacation and I see them it is sort of a struggle to find common group and socialize.”

Interviewer: “Are those people who have stayed in the Valley?”

Participant: “Actually, yeah. And a few that have gone elsewhere and have come back” (Leaver, male)

There was one participant in the group whose husband works out West¹⁰ for a month to six weeks at a time. She stated that there may be things that she would tell herself and her partner to consider, although they are both content with the choice they made.

“I guess I would just tell them to get better at communication sooner. You miss him a lot, but I have gotten used to him not being here all the time. It’s harder now with the baby. I guess that it’s really hard some days and not so hard other days. It’s just what you get used to” (Returner, female)

¹⁰ The term “out West” is used by many people in this study to refer to the provinces west of Ontario, although it is most commonly used to reference Alberta. This term will be used throughout this paper as it is used by participants or in order to protect the identity of participants and the people they refer to.

Take your time

Two participants (a leaver and a stayer) said that they would tell themselves to take their time. One person felt that they would have taken more time to think about what they wanted to do after university. The other stated, “Just to take my time. You don’t need to rush into anything. Take time to actually realize the fun and stuff you are having now. Pace yourself” (Stayer, female).

Money

The two male leavers told me that they would tell themselves to think about money. Although one stated that he would tell himself not to worry so much about it while the other felt that student loans and their future impact are something to be considered that wasn’t before.

5.2.3 Question three: Now, where do you see yourself at thirty or forty?

The purpose of this question was to see how the residential preferences and want change for participants over time in terms of rural and urban living. Seven participants answered this question, excluding one leaver from the responses. First I will offer a breakdown of the responses of this question and then a comparison of the responses to the similar question in Section One.

People were much more specific on what they want for themselves at thirty or forty in this question. This may be because thirty is much closer for us now than when we were eighteen. It may also be because participants had trouble remembering back to what they were abstractly thinking about when they were eighteen. I also think that these answers could be more specific because of the time that participants have had to reflect on issues and experiences of migration. As we have seen so far in these findings several people have stated that they felt they could not really understand the consequences of migration when they were eighteen.

Urban life

Two people, both male leavers, said that they wanted to be living in an urban context when they are in their thirties. They both mentioned that it was aspects of the lifestyle that made urban areas more attractive to them, whether it was adventure of living somewhere new or for the convenience of working in the city.

“If I were to move back to Nova Scotia I would be on a plane 50 percent of the time back and forth to Calgary regardless” (Leaver, male)

Settling down to a rural life

Five people said that they want to be living in a rural area in the Valley when they are in their thirties. Four people mentioned something along the theme of “settling down” such as buying a house or having children

“I mean for me I am always thinking about it because as I am growing and changing it’s like, yeah I want to come back to Nova Scotia. My parents were talking about selling my house and I was like, ‘no, I want that

house!’ and I was like, did I just say that? Do I want to raise my kids here?’ (Leaver, female)

One male leaver stated that he could see himself living away until he was in his forties or fifties:

“I think by that point in my life I will have, hopefully, have had enough experience in the world where I would feel comfortable coming back home and living life where I grew up. Because as much as I feel ashamed of how I felt when I was 18, I still sort of think that it’s something that people who grew up here have to think about. I don’t think it’s unique to rural kids, maybe more pertinent, but I think anyone should get out and see the world as much as they can while they are still able to do that. Whether you are from the Valley or New York. But I think by the time I am 40 or 50 I will have had the chance to do that enough so I can come back home and live in a place that is very cozy and I will always feel comfortable.” (Leaver, male).

Here the explore/escape theme is revisited in a sense that, as stated above, the idea of settling down in the Valley isn’t terrible, but certain achievement must happen outside first.

Changes in residential preferences from late high school to young adulthood

As can be seen in *Table 6* below, the reported residential preferences of the participants changed over time. Primarily, those who saw themselves living in an urban area at thirty when they were in late high school had different residential preferences once they reached young adulthood. Also those participants who felt in high school that they would live in a rural area continue to picture themselves there as they age.

The leavers who continued to report that they wanted to live in an urban area into their thirties were both male participants. However, as the chart demonstrates with the “1.5” in the urban and rural columns for stayers in young adulthood, there is obviously room for people to see themselves in different contexts throughout their thirties and, obviously, throughout the lifespan.

Table 6: Changes in residential preferences from late high school to young adulthood

	<i>Late high school</i> ¹¹		<i>Young adults</i>	
	<i>Rural preference</i>	<i>Urban preference</i>	<i>Rural preference</i>	<i>Urban preference</i>
<i>Stayers</i>	2		2	
<i>Leavers</i>		3	1.5 ¹²	1.5
<i>Returners</i>	1	1	2	

5.2.4 Question four: This question is based on where the individual currently lives.

The intent of this question was to get a better idea of how young adults consider migration as they get a bit older and how certain circumstances play a role in these choices. The specific question asked was based on the current residence of the participant. Six participants answered this question.

¹¹ As established in question five of Section One

¹² The “.5” indicates that one leaver reported wanting to live in rural and urban places between 30 and 40.

5.2.4a: If you currently live in the valley, do you think you will remain here? If you do plan on staying, what factors keep you here? If you do plan on staying what

situation, if any, would make you consider leaving?

*“I would have to be extremely dirt poor broke and have no hope. I don’t think I could. I couldn’t bring myself to go back out there. I don’t want to”
(Returner, female)*

At the time of the interview four people were living in the Valley. Three participants told me that they could not see themselves leaving. When questioned

further though, they were all able to imagine some sort of situation that would cause them to leave.

Most of these individuals stated that they would have to be in serious financial hardship or “dirt poor broke” (Returner, female) or for something to happen to their partner making them unable to work.

“People say you can make new friends, but I want my old friends and I want my family and I want to be able to walk through the woods and know places. I’m just a sentimental person. I honestly couldn’t bring myself to go back out there. I would have to be completely broke and have nothing going for me. I would have to be in a very poor state to consider going back out there.” (Returner, female)

However, all of these participants stated that they felt they would be more likely to “just make it work” in the Valley.

Interviewer: “What if you couldn’t find a job here?”
Participant: “I would find a job here, doing anything”
Interviewer: “Anything?”

Participant: “I would work at McDonald’s. I’m not leaving... I’m going to do it even if it’s hard” (Stayer, female)

Two of the female participants that stated they would not leave have partners who work in the trades. One woman stated that she and her partner would consider an arrangement where he works out West while she remained in the Valley. The other partnership is already in a situation where this type of work takes place.

Participant: “I see him leaving, doing so many months on a month off. I see that as a possibility, but I don’t see me ever leaving. That’s there as an option. He has applied before just to see what he could get, but we haven’t needed to do it yet. But if the time came where we needed to it would definitely be there and we would take the opportunity”

Interviewer: “So it’s not something you are seriously considering right now?” Participant: “It’s an option, a safety net. I don’t think it would have to be that bad for him to go” (Stayer, female)

5.2.4 b: If you currently live away from the Valley, do you ever plan on returning?

If you do, what factors impact your decision?

Of the four people that were interviewed who lived away from the Valley only two responded to this question, both were male participants. One stated that he could see himself moving back to the Valley at some point, depending on whether he felt satisfied with how much he had been able to see and experience of the world:

“Yes [I can see myself coming back]. Just the whole thing about getting out and seeing the world. And I do think that the Valley is a bit more attractive as a place to live than it used to be. It just feels more connected to the rest of the world now. It’s just a little bit that has made it feel less

isolated that would make me feel more comfortable living here” (Leaver, male)

As this discussion continued the participant stated that the things that make the Valley feel less isolated are, most prominently, access to the internet as well as the work that has been done to the highway that connects the Valley to Halifax.

“Absolutely. You can live anywhere and still get that sense of connectedness to the things that are important to you. And I also think physical factors like the improvements to the highway has led to these feelings because it’s significantly easier to go into the city than it was even when I was 14 or 15. So even small things like that do make a difference in how connected or disconnected I feel in a place like this” (Leaver, male)

The second leaver who responded to this question stated that he could not see a situation where he would return to the Valley, saying “I can’t really imagine a scenario that would allow me to maintain my lifestyle and my economic position, to maintain my professional life that would allow me to live in Kentville again” (Leaver, male). The participant and I go on to explore the things about the Valley that make it an undesirable place for him in the future aside from the challenges of his specific career. The interview goes on as follows:

Interviewer: “In an ideal world if you could do the work that you like to do and engage in that professional arena that you want to engage in, if you could do that from ns would you want to?”

Participant: “I don’t think I would. Maybe out of Halifax, but in the Valley? No I don’t think it would. I don’t know if I can explain why or not. Just something tells me that I worked so hard to get out of it that coming back to it is almost like I’m not trying hard enough or something.

I don't know if that makes sense or not. It's more of a gut feeling. I know it sounds really negative, but I dunno it's almost depressing to get all the way out here and then come back to it, if that makes any sense. I think there would have to be a lot of change

Interviewer: "What kind of change?"

Participant: "I think they'd have to be more open to business and development and youth having some kind of influential voice. Kentville specifically, I find is full of very old money and a very regressive social and political system that is really promoting the town as a retirement community. That seems like it doesn't have any particular place for a young professional. Outside of the few financial businesses downtown, working at the post office, the department of natural resources or as a medical professional, there's really not much else. There doesn't seem to be any push to attract anything else." (Leaver, male)

Clearly, this specific participant feels strongly about his home community, although he has no plans on returning in the near future. This piece of interview was interesting because the issue of governance arose organically and, although issues around how communities could be more welcoming to young people is discussed later in the interview, the timing of these comments is important. We continue:

Participant: "No and also because I don't think, I think it would be very difficult to get there and not try to affect change on that and I also think affecting change would be very difficult to get any traction there. I know it sounds negative, but it seems like the general prevailing attitude is that things are this way because they've always been this way and they are going to continue being this way and that's just something that I have no desire to partake in"

Interviewer: "Because it seems impossible to go against that attitude?"

Participant: "Yeah, just for me I know different communities have

different set ups, but Kentville's town council I think is 100 percent people over 50 or retired. the CN railroad grounds that they got from the government behind the rink they built seniors homes and palliative care homes and those definitely have a place, but that was prime downtown real-estate that could have attracted some kind of professional facilities or some kind of more urban development and I think they squandered that and I think that represents the attitude there that really doesn't want any kind of change. I know I'm getting really specific, but that really burns me in that kind of way because I love it and hate it at the same time. I hope it doesn't sound too arrogant or conceded. At the same time it seems so ineffective and very frustrating to watch. (Leaver, male)

As will be discussed more in Section Three, this feeling of disenfranchisement is not unique to this participant. However, these types of issues around youth engagement as a reason for not returning is perhaps pertinent.

5.2.5 Question five: How do these choices affect your relationship with your family?

Your friends?

As in question four of Section One, there were very few participants who stated that their relationships have been impacted in only negative or positive ways because of migration.

Family

Perhaps unsurprising, it was a stayer and a returner that reported only positive impacts on their relationships with family. It should be noted that the returner spoke only of her experience coming back. Only one person reported a negative impact on their relationship with their family and that person was a leaver. In order to understand the

results from this question I will outline the themes that arose from both negative and positive reports.

Positive family impacts

The positive ways that family relationships are impacted by migration were different for stayers, leavers, and returners.

Two stayers and a returner stated that being able to support their families is one very positive outcome of their migration choices.

“I think it’s positive. I think mom and dad knowing that we are right here it’s easier on them because they do need help and they do need support. They need to have someone to call and can get there right away to help with the farm. So that’s probably one of the main reasons we are so close, is that I know that at least there is somebody there that’s going to look after them” (Stayer, female)

“It improved my relationship with my family. My mom owns her own business and it’s really hard on her because she has health issues and if something happened she’s got nobody that she trusts who could come in a take-over. You can’t close your business. It’s hard. Coming back has taken a lot of stress off her”

(Returner, female)

Two leavers stated that their relationships with their family haven’t necessarily been affected by their

migration because they still get to see their family on a fairly regular basis. This could mean that family member visit them in their new home, or the participant returns to the Valley to see them.

“When I am away and I miss them or they miss me, then when I come back it’s really special” (Leaver, female)

Also mentioned by a returner and a leaver was the idea that relationships with family change in positive and negative ways as people grow-up, regardless of migration. For example, one participant stated that her relationship with her family changed more when she gave birth to her first child than when she moved back to the Valley.

“When I didn’t have a baby and I wasn’t pregnant it was kind of like when I was living in the city. I saw them once or twice a week and we talked [on the phone] occasionally. But one I got pregnant I got kind of sick and clingy. So now I talk to my mom every day and see her every other day and talk to [my family] more often” (Returner, female)

Negative family impacts

The main theme that arose when participants spoke about the negative impacts migration has had on their relationships with family was that, as people are away from home it becomes harder for their families to understand their lives.

“The only thing that would change it for me would be the experiences that you have when you are away, they stay with you but they are no longer happening with them. Like the experiences I am having now would normally occur while I’m around my family or I would go away for the weekend and tell them. Whereas when I’m away for so long or if I don’t talk to Mom on the phone the experiences are still part of who I am, but they don’t affect my family. So, things happen to me that are just part of my everyday life and my parents wouldn’t know” (Leaver, female)

For some participants this stretched beyond the everyday activities explored above, and into the bigger experiences of one’s life, such as this example:

Participant: “Even sometimes I notice when I start to tell an anecdote. This happened today for example. I was driving with my dad back from work and he saw a little fiat car driving down the road. He said ‘look at that cute little car’ and I said something along the lines of ‘oh yeah, in Europe they have those all over the place’ and I felt this little tiny twinge of ‘who do you think you are, man? Taking this thing and making it about something you saw in Europe’ and I get that feeling a lot with my family. It's never said, never vocalized, I definitely think it's an undercurrent that run through a lot of my relationships now.

Interviewer: “So there is a feeling of not belonging?”

Participant: “Yeah, definitely” (Leaver, male)

In the above quote this idea of misunderstanding or lack of shared experience and values translates into a feeling of not belonging that actually taxes the relationship.

Impacts on friendships

There were two main ways that participants reported friendships being affected by

“It’s easier to stay in touch with people now. I think technology helps. It’s easier to have friendships now” (Stayer, female)

migration.

Positive impacts on friendships

In a positive way, both stayers mentioned that technology

has enabled them to keep in touch with friends who have migrated away from the Valley. Things like Facebook, Skype, and text messaging were ways that technology was used by the participants in this study.

“None of my friends from high school live in the Valley at all. But I mean, [they live in] Halifax, so it’s not far anyway. We’re still quite close,

we don't see each other very often at all but text messaging and stuff you still know what's going on in their lives" (Stayer, female)

Negative impacts on friendships

On a more negative note, one of the key issues that participants mentioned about the impact migration has had on their friendships has been the way that their lifestyle differs from their close friends. Both those who have stayed and those who have left stated that this makes it harder to relate to their friends who are living in different contexts.

"It's a similar experience with my friends [as my family]. A lot of friends that I was close to in high school who I have nothing in common with now, more because they stayed here and I left. I just feel like we have nothing to talk about anymore. So, that's kind of tough." (Leaver, male)

"It's totally different. They live in apartments, there's people around them all the time. It's busy, so they come here for a break from that. They take the bus, there isn't even a bus here, and everything is a car. It's very different" (Stayer, female)

Although this in many ways a part of growing up, perhaps the difference for rural youth is that the participants in this study stated that they would like to maintain the bonds with the people that they were friends with in high school, many of whom would be friends since early childhood. More study is needed to explore how this might be different for urban youth.

Participant: “That is kind of split down the middle. there’s still a group of friends that every time I’m home and they’re home we hang out we do things we stay in touch. there’s another group that is not so much or that we have drifted apart. I find there’s a lot more in common with me. [Uses examples of having more in common with people who have been away than with people who have stayed.]

Interviewer: “If there was something to keep you here they would have stayed strong, or do you think you would have grown apart anyway?”

Participant: “I think it might have taken longer to grow apart, I’m sure as everyone has kids and gets on with their own families or whatever that happens naturally. But I think if there was something to keep me here it definitely would have taken longer or not at all; the growing apart may not have happened at all. But I do think me leaving definitely accelerated it more.” (Leaver, male)

5.2.6 Question six: Some people on the advisory committee have stated that they feel a lot of emotions when they think about whether or not to stay in the area. Is this an emotional choice for you?

Six out of the seven people that answered this question stated that they continue to find choices about migration emotional as young adults. When describing how migration and migration choices continue to be emotional there were no specific themes to the answers given by these participants. It struck me how individual the experience of migration can be. Although it should be considered that the sample size in this work is quite small, I believe this is also a testament to the deeply personal experience and feelings that migration evokes in people.

“You know what? I think sometimes I try to pretend it’s not, just because it’s easier to deal with and I kinda get enveloped in work and goings on out here and friends out here. But, it’s definitely still an ongoing emotional thing. It was really hard to get an Albertan driver’s license and hand over my Nova Scotia one. That was pretty hard.” (Leaver, male)

“Yeah. You think about what you could be doing if you lived somewhere else or how miserable you would be if you lived somewhere else and sometimes you are miserable here. It just depends on the day” (Returner, female)

Both stayers and leavers described stress within their migration choices. For one stayer who briefly tried living away from the Valley, there was turmoil in both her choice to go and her choice to come back and stay:

“I think its culture shock. There are people all the time. I didn’t know how hard it would be. I knew it would be hard, I knew there would be people everywhere. But, it was like no matter where I went there was someone there. I just wanted to drive away into the country, into the middle of nowhere, but I couldn’t get there.” (Stayer, female)

Interviewer: “Continuing to make the decision to stay, is that emotional for you?” Participant: “Yes, a little bit. I have this conflict: am I staying here to avoid going somewhere else because I can’t handle it? Or am I staying here because I like it? Which is it? I’m pretty sure it’s just because I like it.” (Stayer, female)

Again participants explained how the people they are surrounded with make leaving and staying difficult, similar to question four of Section One. For example, being aware of the opinions and wants of others in the community for your future:

Participant: “But, it’s like when your family are really discouraging toward your decisions, even though you know that they’re right, that’s really hard. It’s just hard when people disagree with what you want to do.”

Interviewer: “Especially when its people that you really value what they say.”

Participant: “That’s probably more of a problem in a small community like this because everybody knows each other and everyone feel entitled to an opinion. Also, you kind of value everyone’s opinion too. Whereas if you were in the city and you walked down the street you wouldn’t know them. Here’s it’s a different kind of idea.”

Interviewer: “If you walked into the drugstore you see five different people and they all know what happened with you.”

Participant: “It’s rough” (Stayer, female)

Another participant who left stated that, when he is away in Alberta, he often feels like an outsider. He told me that in some ways this adds to the stress of migration:

“It was kind of disorienting at first, just because it is still dominated by western Canadians and when you come out here you are definitely, well not marked, but it’s known that you are a Maritimer when you are out here. Also we are kind of our own worst enemies. I’ve noticed myself and other do it, we immediately assert ourselves as Nova Scotians or Maritimers whenever we get into a situation like that... So, I don’t know if it’s a social thing that we do subconsciously out here or if we try to set ourselves apart or trying to keep our identity by saying we aren’t Albertans or from Saskatchewan or British Columbia. We’re here. We aren’t those people, we are something else. If that makes any sense at all” (Leaver, male)

He also adds that because so many people have made the migration to Alberta that there is solidarity in his identity as a Maritimer:

“There are so many people who have done the same migration I have out here. Just in my apartment building alone I can think of at least three different people who have made very similar choices to my own. We can talk about it and bullshit over it over a beer and you understand why each of you did it. So it’s kind of less difficult emotionally” (Leaver, male)

The one individual who stated that migration was not an emotional choice stated that she felt it was partly her personality, but also the fact that in her situation she feels that there isn’t really anything that would cause her to migrate.

Participant: “I don’t think so, but I think that’s my personality type. It doesn’t really get emotional for me at all.”

Interviewer: “Do you think part of that is because when you think of a situation that would make you leave, you can’t even picture it? Even if your husband went away to work you would still be here.

Participant: “Yeah, I think so. In my head I know I am going to be here and I know everything that’s going on and the people around me” (Stayer, female)

This example illustrates that it could possibly be the threat of *needing* to migrate that may be the issue for young adults.

5.3 Section Three: Support in making choices about migration

All eight participants took part in this section. The first four questions of this section focus on the support and advice given to participants when they were finishing high school. The final three questions explore the ways that participants currently give and receive advice about migration.

Generally, there were a lot of themes that can be seen throughout this section. When finishing high school, many of the participants described the advice that they got from many adults as being “pushy”. Participants described this as adults not focusing on the aspirations that they held and instead herding them into post-secondary institutions and careers that did not reflect the needs of these participants. In many of the interviews, the push with the expectation that the best thing for youth to do was to go the local Acadia University or the local Nova Scotia Community College campus. This is counter to the findings of Hektner (1995) who found that rural youth often feel pressure to leave for post-secondary education and later careers. One reason that this may be different for the youth in this study is that the Valley is home to a major university and several provincial community colleges.

Another clear theme was that participants were hungry for advice that came from experience. The experience that was most wanted was going away to university, but some participants also stated that they would have liked to connect with people who had migrated out West or had gone into specific careers. This was reported as a key piece that was missing from these participant experiences with high school guidance counselors, who participants felt had a lack of knowledge of careers and universities outside of the Valley area. Participants also told me that they felt guidance counsellors had a lack of

investment in the individual success of students and that this was evidenced by their lack of knowledge and pushing students onto paths that did not reflect their own aspirations.

Another interesting finding within this section is that every participant stated that migration issues, such as the difficulties of leaving home (and coming back), were missing from the advice they were getting at eighteen. Conversations with guidance counselors, family and friends often focus on what participants were “doing” instead of where they wanted to live or the kind of lifestyle they wanted to have at various stages of their life. For example, a young person may be encouraged to pursue a career that in reality is most sought after in urban areas without having a conversation about what this may mean for their lifestyle later on. While this was missing when participants were finishing high school, many participants told me that this is something that is often a topic of conversation with friends and family. This was most true for leavers.

An area that is not explored in other research on the outward migration of rural youth is the impact that media has on the choices that young people make. In this study it was found that many of the participants used media such as internet and television to inform their choices. It was reported that internet was used to research various universities and the communities where they are located, while television informed participants’ ideas about rural and urban living.

A strong theme within this section was that participants unanimously felt that older adults do not understand migration and the “real world” in the same way that people of our generation do. It was found that many participants felt that older adults do not understand the pull of job opportunities and adventures to be had outside of the Valley, and the way that must be balanced by young adults with the need to be close to

family and community. Some participants described feelings of being seen as a “traitor” for leaving.

Finally, within the theme of advice in support, participants encouraged the need to tell youth to “do what makes them happy” above other considerations. Many participants told me that this is the advice they wish they had gotten from adults when they were finishing high school and it is often something that they tell youth in their own lives.

5.3.1a Question one: When you were finishing high school, did you get advice and/or support from adults in your life when you were making choices about migration?

Five participants told me that they got both advice and support, four of whom were leavers and the other participant a returner. The other four participants told me that they got more of one than the other. Both stayers stated that they got more advice than support while one returner explained that she got more in the way of support than advice.

5.3.1b: .Who gave you advice? What kind of advice did they give?

Most participants stated that the advice they got came primarily from family and friends. Others that gave advice were people from work, extracurricular activities such as drama or sports, and individuals from work placement or co-op programs.

“Most of it was advice, from everyone. My family, a lot of people I worked with.” (Stayer, female)

Although the next question explores more on the advice and support given through the school system, one participant stated in her response to this question that she did not receive as much advice from the school system as she had hoped:

“My friends and family were there for advice. If I wanted advice from someone from the school system it would be someone who I was really comfortable being like, ‘what can I really expect going into this degree because you have a background in it’. But if I wanted that from the school system I’d have to talk to the guidance counselor and I didn’t always feel comfortable getting advice from the guidance counselors. Maybe I was expecting more from the guidance counselors and principals as well. Like you kind of want to know what they think of this school or what it’s like going to school there. But at NKEC [a lot of the teachers] went to Acadia.” (Leaver, female)

It was reported that a lot of the advice that was given revolved specifically on whether or not to attend university and which school to attend.

“I think the sort of advice that I got from my parents and other adults sort of stopped at ‘you should go to university’” (Leaver, male)

“Everyone was giving me advice like, ‘go to a small school’ or ‘go to a big school’” (Leaver, female)

5.3.1c : Was this advice valuable?

Most of the participants told me that the advice they got was valuable in some ways such as advice for stayers to live with their parents or for leavers to consider the prestige of the school they attended.

“I think it was all valuable in the sense that it was all quite true.” (Leaver, female)

“Some, yeah” (Stayer, female)

However, there were aspects of the advice given to participants that was not helpful. Again we see how the experiences of the participants have both good and bad

elements. For some participants the advice that they were getting was so varied and from so many different perspectives that it was hard to know what advice to take:

“Up until November I wanted to go into a BA [and then science]. So they are really far apart. I talked to a few people and they said that [science] wasn’t right for me. Other people said I would be good at it. So it’s kind of like, whose advice do I take?” (Leaver, female)

“Yeah, the advice people gave was helpful, but there was so much of it and from quite a few different types of people...Everyone in my life has their opinions on things and I think that was a bit frustrating because the adults in my life, they do have different backgrounds... Everyone is so diverse, which I should be happy about. But at the time all of the advice was very overwhelming.” (Leaver, female)

Another participant also stated that she felt the advice she was getting from some people was more of a way for other people to elevate their own conscious

“I think it was more valuable to them. Like, ‘I need to tell her this so I feel better’ or ‘If I don’t say this to her I’ll regret it later’” (Stayer, female)

5.3.1d: Did you feel pressure to follow their advice?

Four people stated that they did feel at least a little pressure to follow the advice that they were given. For some the pressure came from not wanting to disappoint those people giving the advice:

“There is a certain part of me that wanted to impress people. If there was someone at the time who you look up to who is stable in their job and you can tell they have a lot of money and they appear very happy, you want to

be like them. So when they say go to a big school, you want to go to a big school” (Leaver, 22)

Whether or not the advice that participants received was valuable seemed to hinge on the type of advice that was given and whether it really addressed the concerns that participants had at the time:

“I think the sort of advice that I got from parents and other adults sort of stopped at ‘you should go to university’ and that was pretty much it. Just ‘you should go’, so just a general shove in that direction without any specifics” (Leaver, male)

“Not really [valuable]. It kind of felt at time, more like pressure than advice based on experience of knowledge or something because the people telling me were the people who had never done it themselves” (Leaver, male)

5.3.1e: Who gave you support? What kind of support did they give? Looking back, was this support valuable?

All of the participants stated that they received some kind of support. However, the value of the support varied.

“I think any support is valuable” (Stayer, female)

“No significant support. I didn’t get unsupport. I didn’t have people beating me down or anything. But the kind of support you describe? I don’t think I explicitly got that” (Leaver, male)

The value of the supported seemed to hinge on the whether or not the participants perceived the support as heartfelt.

“Yeah. I just don’t think it was heartfelt support. I guess I always felt supported, but I never felt like someone was really, really in my corner no matter what” (Leaver, male)

Participants described two main instances when they felt support was not heartfelt.

One way that support was seen as less than heartfelt was that it was described as “just words”. This could also be described as support that was unauthentic or, as described by the participant below, lacked evidence or perhaps action.

“I mean my parents and family would always say that ‘we are very proud of you and we’re glad you are doing this’ but those were just words. I never really felt substance behind them I guess” (Leaver, male)

Another way that participants felt as though the support they received was not sincere was that it seemed to be conditional on following the path that was pushed by others.

“I think that’s what people do anyway, they are supportive as long as you do what they want you to do. Then when you don’t do what they want, they aren’t as happy with you” (Stayer, female)

“There was support through the decision making... But you could tell where they were supported more.” (Leaver, female)

Themes arising from support and advice

Two themes arise when you look at these findings. The first is that many participants value advice and support that came from experience. It appeared that the

advice that came from experience was more trusted and more sought out by these participants when they were finishing high school.

The second theme that I could see overall in this question was that many participants had solidified their choices and that they would not be budged from that regardless of the advice or support they were given.

“My family understood that I am going to do what I am going to do regardless.” (Leaver, male)

As described in Section Two, this may be linked with the idea of “just knowing” as many of the participants who described “just knowing” also said that they were determined to leave and advice outside of that wasn’t going to impact their choice at the time.

5.3.2a: Question two: Did you talk to a guidance counselor at school about your future plans?

Only one of the participants who was interviewed stated that they did not speak to a guidance counselor when they were in grade twelve at NKEC. Some of the participants stated that it was mandatory to speak to a guidance counselor, however it is unclear if this has always been the practice.

The individual who did not speak to the guidance counselor stated that she did not go because she “found her pushy” (Stayer, female). When asked if she felt it would have been some benefit to her, the participant stated “I guess I would have felt more sure. I would have known what I was getting into”.

5.3.2b: Was it helpful?

Of the seven people who did speak to a guidance counselor only one stated that

this was helpful. Yet, the participant stated that the interaction still fell short of the guidance she felt she needed.

“Yeah. I think it was [helpful] because if [the guidance counselor] wasn’t there then there wouldn’t be a post-secondary day, I wouldn’t have met the recruiter from [my university] who got me a scholarship. [The guidance counselor] has a role, but those specific meetings that I had I felt like they weren’t very helpful.” (Leaver, female)

There are three themes that emerge from the interviews that state why the encounters with guidance counselors were not helpful for the participants interviewed.

Lack of information

Four people told me that one of the main shortcomings of their interaction with guidance counselors was that these individuals did not have the breadth of information that participants had wanted at the time. All of the participants who spoke about this theme were leavers who wanted specific information about going away.

Two participants stated that they felt that the information that was available focused on the local Acadia University and community colleges.

“Like when companies come in and set up in booths in the gym, I remember them being heavy towards jobs that came from the community colleges and different community college programs being heavily represented there, but not so much universities” (Leaver, male)

“I feel like it was really geared to people who were staying and going to Acadia, staying and going to Kingstech and staying and going into the

workforce. That was where the knowledge was. And people in the O2¹³ program or people who needed help graduating or people who excelled at applying for scholarships to Acadia” (Leaver, female)

I believe that it is important to note that, while participants report not getting the information they needed in terms of universities, due to the small amount of people involved in this study who attended the local community college or stayed in the Valley to work, it is difficult to get a full picture of the information available to these students as well. In other words, it is difficult to say that there was more information available to students who want to go to community college or go right to work because of the lack of representation of these individuals in this study.

From a rural sustainability perspective, placing weight on local careers (that are often undervalued, such as factory work) and education that allows people to stay in the rural community is not entirely bad. However, what needs to be considered as part of the discussion on rural youth migration is that not all young people want to or should stay in their small rural areas even if there are supports and opportunities for them to do so. Along with rural sustainability there needs to be recognition that there are other valuable things for our youth to do.

Also fitting into this theme was the need for information and advice that came from people who have experienced various careers and migration experiences themselves. For example, one participant who was trying to make the choice between two

¹³ A program in Nova Scotia high schools that connects high school students who are struggling in traditional classes with career and co-op opportunities.
<http://www.ednet.ns.ca/O2/>

very different career paths felt that there should be more support in connecting students with adults who work in various fields. Another participants stated that:

Interviewer: “It sounds like you wanted advice from someone who had done it, and you didn’t know anyone who had done it”

Participant: “Yeah. I wanted advice from someone who really knew what they were talking about and I don’t think I got that at all.”

Interviewer: “Knew what they were talking about as in they experienced it? Or knew what they were talking about because they were educated on how to give advice?”

Participant: “Well, I think more the first one. Yeah, someone who had been through it and really knew what the deal was.” (Leaver, male)

This idea of wanting a mentor who had life experience came up in various parts of almost every interview. In the context of this quote it is important to note that in rural communities there are fewer people with university or community college degrees (Dupuy et al, 2000; Looker, 2001) and perhaps even fewer people who have traveled compared to more urban areas. As will be explored more in the discussion chapter of this work, the participants in this study expressed a need for some kind of mentorship situation to allow students in high school to speak with people who have varying experiences. More specifically, people in their twenties and thirties who have been away or continue to live in other areas.

Pushing

Four participants (three leavers and a stayer) felt that they were pushed by

*“They try to shove you in the direction they think is best for you”
(Leaver, female)*

guidance counselors toward certain careers or education institutions that the participants felt did not meet their interests or needs. Similar to the issues discussed in the theme of lack of

information, these participants described that they felt they were pushed to local institutions, primarily Acadia or the local Nova Scotia Community College.

“I didn’t always feel comfortable getting advice from the guidance counselors because I felt like I was being steered in a way that I didn’t want to be steered” (Leaver, female)

In one instance a participant felt as though he was pushed toward trade schools when his real aspirations were to attend university. Describing the interaction as “rehearsed” the participant felt as though his interests and aptitudes were not considered.

“She definitely encouraged not migrating and considering community college or military or policing services at the time. It was very generic counselling. I felt like she didn’t really take into account any of my academics or anything I was really saying to her. It was more of a rehearsed kind of thing. I remember feeling very disappointed and feeling like it didn’t help me at all after I did it. It sort of pushed me in one way and she had a prepared speech and just gave that to me, and that was that” (Leaver, male)

It is not hard to imagine that the described experience would be frustrating. As reported in Section One, making these choices can be very stressful for some youth, and to feel as

though you are not receiving support that is unique to you may even add to this stress.

Investment

All of the participants described the interaction they had with guidance counselors as lacking investment in their specific situation, wants, and needs. As seen in the examples above, participants used descriptions such as “rehearsed” and “pushed” to explain the advice they received. This lack of investment is illustrated by one participant:

“I just didn’t feel like they were invested in me...I didn’t feel like they cared. They were friends with five students and helped them apply and got them off to where they were going. I think they should make a bigger investment in more students and even the ones who are just barely passing or something and just try to help them more. I don’t know if they helped them or not. Not just the ones who are smart, don’t just help them get into school, help other people. I don’t know if they do that” (Stayer, female)

The other themes of pushing and a lack of information seem to accumulate into this notion of lack of investment that was experienced by many of the participants who were interviewed. However, as only eight people were interviewed for this work it is difficult to understand how this would affect youth in the community as a whole. It is also important to consider the words of this participant:

“I mean, part of that is experience. You just know it better if you went there or if you live in the community where the university, college or job opportunity is. You are going to know more about it. Of course, that’s only realistic. But at the same time if it’s your job to be helping people through the emotional or financial part of making decisions, it’s really your responsibility to be a supporter through that.” (Leaver, female)

These words remind me of the old adage that “you can’t be everything to everybody”. Guidance counselors are working with a limited amount of resources and time while they are expected to address the needs of every student in a graduating class. This dilemma is not one that is unfamiliar to social work. However, the descriptions given by the participants here are wrought with frustration and disappointment, which many of them stated affected their choices and stress levels as they finished high school. This in itself is an important issue that should be explored in terms of rural youth and their migration choices.

5.3.2c: What, if anything, would you have changed?

Extending the above three themes, participants offered ways that they would change the encounter with or the role of the high school guidance counselor to better meet their needs when making choices about life after high school.

*“I just wish people would say to do what makes you happy. I mean, yes it’s important to support yourself and it’s important to live a decent life. But at the same time when you die, you die alone. So why not do what you want?”
(Returner, female)*

Quite a few participants told me that the guidance counselors at their high school were really versed and supportive in helping them find information about scholarships that were available to them. However, one participant felt that she would have liked more support with this.

Validation

A common theme was that many participants wanted validation on their choices and wants for the future. In other words, they really wanted to hear from a guidance

counselor that the choices that they were making for themselves were good ones. In other words

“I don’t know what my expectation really was. I guess I was looking for her to say that it was the right choice based on what I told her” (Leaver, male)

Interviewer: “You wanted solid advice”

Participant: “Yes, not just a fruity tutti crap”

Interviewer: “You were looking for someone to tell you if it would be a good choice for you in the long run?”

Participant: “Yep” (Leaver, female)

Advice from experience

There was also a reported need for advice that came from life experience, particularly on issues related to university life and moving away from home:

“I wanted to know if I had to live next to boys. What was frosh like? Am I actually going to make friends?” (Leaver, female)

“I would like someone who really knew what they were talking about and could speak to me in a way that didn’t feel patronizing and was someone who I felt like could understand where I was coming from and could get in my head and I knew could understand what I wanted out of life, I guess. Someone who had experienced these things before and kind of knew what the deal was.” (Leaver, male)

As stated above, this idea arose throughout the interviews in various contexts. This idea will be discussed in a more in-depth way in the discussion chapter.

5.3.2d: Did you talk to guidance counselors about issues around migration?

This question was not part of the original interview and was added as a result of the first interview. I thought that guidance counselors may be able to give advice on migration in a way the parents who had not left the Valley may not. However, this was not the case.

When asked if participants were informed about issues around migration and residential preferences all answered that it was not a topic of discussion with guidance counselors, nor were they offered any information about it.

Many participants stated that discussions were centered on what kind of job you wanted or what school you wanted to attend. Residential preferences were not discussed in connection with these things.

Participant: “No. I don’t think that it was ever really discussed at all with guidance counselors. I don’t think any questions surrounding where you want to be as far as physical location came up”

Interviewer: “Did they ask you what you wanted to do?”

Participant: “Yeah. Of course.” (Leaver, male)

This is an important topic of discussion because, especially when thinking about staying rural, occupation has a lot to do with the location in which you must live. For example, if a person finishing high school wanted to pursue a career in under water welding, then they must live close to a dock yard which are most often located within urban areas. To the same extent a young person interested in forestry development would probably need to live in a rural area that is close to woodlands that can be developed. As the responses to this question point out, this link may not be made for youth when they

are making long term choices about their education and future careers. As shown by the quote below, these types of considerations may be hard for youth to understand when they are making plans for their careers. This is especially true as we have seen throughout this study that issues surrounding migration are often not on the mind of those just finishing high school.

Interviewer: “Do you think that guidance counselors should talk to youth about residential preferences and migration?”

Participant: “Yeah, absolutely. Especially because, like I said, when I was eighteen I didn't really think about that really, about what leaving or staying [meant]... I didn't really think about how that would impact me. But now looking back on it I feel it a lot. Whether you stay in a community, where you go and whether you go. That has a huge impact on your life and that's probably not something we don't think about enough at that age and the people giving us advice don't think about it enough I would imagine. That was true in my case because no one really talked to me about those questions at all. Aside from my grandmother telling me ‘I really want you to stay close to me’ but that doesn't really count” (Leaver, male)

5.3.3a Question three: Do you feel like you got enough information when you left high school to make good choices about migration?

Six participants answered this question. Three leavers, a stayer, and a returner stated that they felt they had enough information when they were leaving high school to make good choices. However, all but one returner stated that the information they received came from the universities that they were planning on attending.

“Yes, but a lot of it I found myself” (Leaver, female)

“Yes, but I would add that the information came from the universities themselves, so obviously it’s a very biased set of information. The information came from universities more and I understand now that a guidance counselor can’t have all the answers, but I felt like I was only being guided for one thing and the rest of it I had to figure out for myself” (Leaver, female)

Another participant also stated that, although she felt like she had enough information, she realizes that the information that she got from the university itself is biased.

“I think because I know people who work for [the university] I did, but for that reason it was biased because I had more information about [that university]. So I picked that one.” (Stayer, female)

Two leavers and a stayer told me that they felt as though they did not have enough information to make good choices about their plans after high school. The lack of information varied from short-term practical knowledge to more long term considerations that involve migration:

Interviewer: “When you went to Kingtech on the first day, do you think that you were prepared or as prepared as you could have been to start your program and really hit the ground running?”

Participant: “No. I didn’t really know. I remember a couple days before [starting] thinking I don’t even know where the front door is. I’d never been in the building, I don’t know anyone that’s going to be there. I had no idea” (Stayer, female)

“I think I would have liked to have known how difficult it was, I probably wouldn’t have listened. But I think I would have liked to maybe have someone sit me down and be like, ‘look dude, university is fucking hard and you are going to have to work at this and you might have to make some hard choices at the end of it because you might be broke and over qualified for something or just be forced into some kind of choice at the end of it. This four or five years is kind of a ticking countdown to some kind of choice. I don’t think I understood that” (Leaver, male)

5.3.3b: Did you get information from media? What kind?

Six participants answered this question and three leavers, a stayer, and a returner stated that they did get and use information from various media to help them make choices about migration. A few participants told me that the information they got from various media was more helpful or had more of an impact than what they received from people in their lives.

Interviewer: “It seems like the information you got from the [internet], in a practical way, was more helpful than what you were getting from people” Participant: “In some ways, yes” (Leaver, female)

“Ummm, I’m not sure about helpful. It definitely had more of an impact. As far as helpfulness it was probably about the same. But in terms of the impact it had on me. The info I was getting from the media was way higher up in that regard just because I didn’t feel like anyone who was giving me advice or support knew what they were talking about so I was still looking for advice and support so I was looking for it in other places: the media. I don’t think it ended up being better, I was just prioritizing it higher because I didn’t feel I was getting that from adults in my life.”

(Leaver, male)

Internet

Two leavers from this group told me that they used the internet to get information specifically to research various universities and the communities that they were in. Also, because of the way the internet is such a staple in the lives of many people at this point in history it may be possible to guess that in some way the internet was used by most of the participants to get information at some point in their migration choices. However, one participant pointed out that the availability and usefulness of the internet had changed even since he graduated from high school eight years ago:

Interviewer: “I wonder too the way we used internet then and the way we used internet now is very different. Now I would use the internet, but back then.” Participant: “Absolutely, because we were just before internet really took off was when we were leaving. So, I imagine kids now from when we left is a whole new world out there.” (Leaver, male)

Television

A leaver and a stayer also talked about the way they used television to inform their choice about migration. One participant went so far as to say that their career choice was impacted by images of the profession that she saw on TV.

“In all of the movies and the TV shows you see people living in the cities and they are living a glamorous lifestyle. So I was going to move to the city and I was going to live a glamour lifestyle. TV definitely influences me a lot” (Stayer, female)

These participants also acknowledge that the images of small town and city life are produced in vary specific ways that don't always match their own experience.

Participant: “TV to go because in terms of cities, but then like small towns. Sort of how that’s portrayed kind of made me want to come home”

Interviewer: “Do you think it’s accurate? The way they portray small towns?” Participant: “no because, they call small town like 20,000 people and they have their own high school and you don’t know everybody in town. But small town for me, like there are two stop signs, there’s no store, no high school and we distinguish our towns than I think they portray on TV. Like on TV Canning would be central and everything around it would be the town because there is a high school and a grocery store” (Stayer, female)

“All of the fun and glamorous and funny and interesting people you see on TV, generally speaking live in the city. Like compare Friends and Corner Gas. How much is rural life even depicted in popular media. You hardly ever see it and when we do, we get Corner Gas. I mean it’s a fine show, but it’s not really speaking very highly of rural life. I especially think someone in a rural community and an 18 year old is looking to sitcoms and reality television to form those ideas about rural and city life.” (Leaver, male)

5.3.4a: If you had to guess, when you were finishing high school, were more of your friends planning on staying in or leaving the Valley?

When forming this question I thought that participants might report that their friends were making similar choices to themselves. For example, stayers would be friends with other people who chose to stay. However, this was only really true for leavers, with three out of four of these participants stating that a majority of their friends in high school were planning on leaving.

Most of the people interviewed said that, regardless of staying or leaving, their

friends were planning on attending some kind of post-secondary education institution and many reported friends pursuing the same kind of education that they were. This was unsurprising as all but one of the participants in this study attended some kind of post-secondary institution. Of those who reported their friends leaving they explained that most were staying in Nova Scotia and many going to Halifax.

“It seemed like a lot were leaving. Mostly to Halifax, a lot to different community colleges throughout the Maritimes. It didn’t seem like anyone was leaving the Maritimes, not that I can remember anyway” (Leaver, male)

5.3.4b: Did you talk to your friends about staying or leaving? Did you ask their advice or give any advice on the issue?

All of the participants interviewed told me that they did not speak to their friends about issues of migration when they were finishing high school. The discussions that were happening were more related to where each person was going to school or what kind of career they wanted to have:

“I don’t really remember it being a discussion. I don’t really remember thinking about it as discussing leaving, it was more about discussing where we were going and what we were going to do when we were there and not really giving much thought to it” (Leaver, male)

“It was more centred around school. I think that now it is more centered around migration” (Leaver, female)

Participant: “I’m not sure. I’m sure you had this sort of conversation like, ‘I can’t wait to get out of here. I really want to go and see the world’ kind

thing. I'm sure I had that because that was really on my mind so I must have had that conversation a lot"

Interviewer: "But it wasn't a, 'let's talk about our options', but a 'man, I can't wait to get out' kind of thing."

Participant: "Yeah. It wasn't a 'let's sit down and discuss what this means for my life'" (Leaver, male)

5.3.5a: Question five: Do you currently seek advice from older adults (our parent's generation or older) on migration issues?

Five (four leavers and a returner) of the eight participants stated that they do seek advice from older adults about migration. The leavers in this study spoke the most about seeking advice about migration from older adults. A few people said that they speak to their family and parents about their concerns, but many people also said that they seek out older adults who have life experience with migration:

"Most of the people outside of academics or industry are family. I don't think my family exactly understands what I do at work, they just understand that I go somewhere and make money. But I do still talk to them about it" (Leaver, male)

"I ask people who I know have left and came back here or people whose advice I really value. If I ever meet someone from the Valley outside the Valley, obviously we have beers and talk about things because that's how you do .So, yeah, I do seek tons of advice now." (Leaver, male)

5.3.5b: Do you feel as though older adults see your concerns in the same way that you do? If there are differences, what are they?

When asked if older adults understand migration concerns in the same way as people of our generation do every participant told me that they felt the understandings of

older adults were different. Participants offered three main ways that the views of older adults differ from their own.

They've always stayed

The first reason given for the differing understanding of migration was reported to be because most of the older adults that these participants know and talk to about their concerns have always lived in the Valley. As is shown in the quotes below, this makes it hard for older adults to understand the why young adults might want to leave in the first place.

“I don't feel like they understand what it is like to leave because most of them have stayed here. I think that they more so expect you to stay because that's what they did and that's what everyone around here has done and hey like to see young people so they are happy with you staying. If you were to move they don't understand how exciting it is to move away, but I don't think they understand that if you stay you are giving up opportunities” (Stayer, female)

“A lot of adults I know in the Valley are people who have never left. So their idea of staying and leaving is so drastically different from my own that we can't even have a conversation about it because we are coming from such dramatically different places” (Leaver, male)

“The rest of the world is such a mystery. A weird place to them that they can't understand why anyone would want to leave here” (Leaver, male)

These quotes also point to the pride that older adults have in the area and in a way to the question, 'if it was good enough for me, why isn't it for you?'.

Different opportunities for staying and leaving

“They never had our opportunities, they never had to make these decisions so they don’t understand what we are going through in general.”
(Stayer, female)

As noted in the quote above, young people have many more opportunities to travel, attend university, and work in a greater variety of fields than ever before. However, as the participant quoted below explains, participants felt that people of our parent’s generation had more viable long-term opportunities in the Valley than our generation does. As is stated, these previous opportunities may have required less training and formal education to achieve.

“When my dad started [at the factory] I don’t think he even had grade twelve yet. Those guys, a lot of them at the plant don’t have their grade twelve or have their grade 12 in military training and they are making fifty to sixty thousand a year with security and benefits with very minimal education. Now, I think that kind of job is extremely rare. A grade twelve is a minimum for work outside of Future Shop or the theatre or something like that. We have to spend time and money to get any kind of job that even comes close to what that job market was twenty or thirty years ago. I don’t think they get how much extra effort it takes for us to find a job like that” (Leaver, male)

One leaver also extended these remarks about older adults to the advice she is getting from young adults who are just finishing university.

Interviewer: “So maybe they don’t understand necessarily the reality, they are going by their own experience. But like you said, it’s different now”

Participant: “Yeah, that’s what I would say. You know, maybe the only people who I’ve talked to are those who just finished [university] or are a couple years out, but at the same time it’s like times are going to be different by the time I’m done. Yeah, so it’s hard to ask for advice because everyone is experiencing it differently.” (Leaver, female)

This is not a new situation. Opportunities for work and education change with the neo-liberal market and globalization. However, the current generation of young adults are living in a world where, arguably, these situations are changing more rapidly. The recession of 2008, rising tuition prices, and unemployment (which is higher for young people than any other group according to Chaundy (2012)) could be affecting this generation in ways that are unfamiliar to others.

The perspective of Seniors

A few participants also noted that the senior people they know have a different outlook than our parent’s generation. Perhaps as more evidence to the comments above about changing opportunities, the experiences of these participants may identify why these differing views come to exist.

“Yes. Older, like elderly. They don’t see the consequences of choosing to stay versus choosing to go to a city or go out West where there is lots of employment opportunities. They just see you leaving. They don’t realize what you are giving up to stay.” (Stayer, female)

“For example, at my [mother’s work] it’s pretty much full of Seniors and she has told me that she gets some offhand remarks from them. Like, ‘I don’t know why you would let your son leave’, ‘what’s so bad about here

that they wouldn't stay here?' I don't think they even understand why it's an option." (Leaver, male)

This quote not only captures what some people of a generation might feel about outward migration. It also indicates how people in the community may feel entitled to express their opinions on what young adults in the community are doing and sheds some light on the comments made in question one of Section One when participant refer to community gossip.

5.3.6a: Question 6: Is this something that you currently talk about with your friends?

A stayer and three leavers told me that they do speak with their current friends about migration. A stayer and both returners said that they did not. Perhaps this could be because those who have stayed or returned feel more settled and are not thinking about "coming home".

"Yeah, for sure. It's something I talk to everyone about because it's something that I am experiencing right now. I am experiencing this decision of where I want to spend the next few years of my life. So it's something that's immediately on my mind" (Leaver, male)

Similar to question four of this section, a few participants said that their discussions still revolve more around jobs, education, and careers rather than residential preferences, although that is becoming more of a topic of conversation.

"I think more of what we are talking about is leaving for school, it wasn't back then or right now about where we are going to find jobs. I think that

when we talk about migrating for jobs it [is for] summer positions. So many of my friends couldn't find work for the summer" (Leaver, female)

5.3.6b: Is it a different conversation when you talk about this issue with friends from home than friends from other areas?

"Yeah, it is absolutely. Light years, completely opposite"
(Leaver, male)

Because this study focuses on the uniqueness of rural youth migration it was important to understand how these young adults share their experiences with other young adults

who did not grow up in the Valley. Five people told me that they felt that people who grew up outside of the Valley do not really understand their experiences and the choices they currently make about migration.

One person said that people from away do not understand the tight knittedness of the community someone might have to leave behind

"I feel like they don't have the same relationship. Like if I move away I'm not just leaving my parents, I'm leaving the whole community and structure. It's like your family is the whole community, it's not just two or three people and your friends. It's everybody and everything" (Stayer, female)

Another told me that she found the people from outside the Valley seem to focus more on money and do not understand the need to be in a certain place despite the poor economic opportunities:

"I worked in a restaurant [out West] and when I told my old customers that I was moving back to Nova Scotia the first thing they ask is if I have

a job. They're like, 'oh the tips aren't going to be as good out there' and I'm like, that's not the point. I want to be in my home" (Returner, female)

One participant who has lived out West stated that people there don't really understand the necessity of making the choice to leave:

"One thing that frustrates me out here is that people from here don't understand what it means to make the choice to go somewhere in order to support yourself. There is definitely a difference in it because when I talk to other Maritimers it's almost casual how we talk about making the choice because it's so common. Then it's almost a bit judgmental when I talk to other Canadians because it's almost like they can't believe I would abandon ship and go elsewhere" (Leaver, male)

A returner explained that she feels that there are parts of the social life of growing up in the Valley that makes it harder for us to adapt to other situations and make friends. This conversation was especially intriguing to me as I have often had similar feelings.

Interviewer: "Do you find that people that you've known who grew up in a city, do you think it was as traumatic for them to leave home?"

Participant: "No. I think being raised in a city you get more socialized and better able to adapt to different situations or you are used to different groups of people. Whereas here in the Valley you grew up with that one group of friends and that it. Then they all disperse after high school and you hardly ever see any of them and it's harder to make new friends because you have been so attached to this core group. Where I think you are more adaptive if you grew up in the city because you have that core group of friends but you have all these other acquaintances that you can see more readily because you are closer."

Interviewer: "Did we ever really have to make friends before we went to university?"

Participant: “We just kind of grew together. We didn’t have to make friends, there were just people we grew up with and then we get thrown out into this huge world and were like ‘how do I talk to these people?’”
(Returner, female)

Unlike other participants, one leaver felt as though there was some common thread that can run through the experiences of many young adults who have migrated regardless of where they grew up.

“I mean obviously when I am talking about it with people who grew up here they are all absolutely, very intensely familiar with everything I talk about because they experience the same thing. When I talk about it with people who didn't grow up in the Annapolis Valley, we can still find a lot of common ground because I feel like these kind of things are things everyone struggles with regardless of where they came from. It is obviously a little bit of a different conversation because we don't have the same things in common, so I guess it's the same conversation, it's just that the people who grew up here get it more because of the shared experience.” (Leaver, male)

5.3.7: Question seven: Are there youth in your life (age fifteen to twenty) who talk to you about issues around migration?

All of the participants stated that they know youth aged fifteen to twenty who they give advice to about migration. The advice that participants said they would give varies. However, most of the advice falls into three themes.

Do what makes you happy

Both stayers said that they would give this advice and within their interviews it was shown that this is advice they would have liked to have gotten themselves.

“I tell them to do what they want, to really not listen to everyone else because a lot of people in their lives see what they want them to do and I find that most just don’t know what they want to do and I can relate to that. Just take it easy and not plan everything exactly out” (Stayer, female)

“I told her to do what she wanted to do, to do what made her happy. That’s the thing I keep telling anyone who I see. Do what makes you happy, even if it’s hard. Even if you aren’t sure that’s what you want to do, do it. I just wish someone had told me that, not to limit myself to certain things. Don’t think that you are going to be a famous singer, don’t have crazy expectations. But if it’s something that you want to do and you work at it you definitely can do it, I don’t think that’s stupid.” (Stayer, female)

One participant also spoke about her experience talking to parents about how to support their recent high school graduate:

“Well they can do it. If they fail so what? They’ll do something else. They will find something they like eventually. That’s even what I told someone’s parents, their kid graduated and was going to go to Kingstech and he didn’t like it and he was going to do the R.C.M.P. and then he didn’t want to move away. I told them, I completely understand. He will find something to do eventually. He’s not sitting on his butt all day every day, he’s working and he’s thinking about what he wants to do. Someday he will just get this magic idea and that will be it” (Stayer, female)

A leaver and a returner said that they push youth to at least try living outside of the Valley.

“Try it for a year, like really try it. Don’t move to Halifax and come home all the time. Try to meet new people and go out and do things” (Returner, female)

“I am always telling people that you can come back in a couple years. You should always take some time to just go and see what the world is about. I always give that advice to everybody” (Leaver, male)

Advice for going out West

There are a few participants in this study who have lived in Alberta, which is a popular spot for Nova Scotians and other Maritimers to migrate to because of the employment opportunities due to the oil industry. Overall, their advice to young people who are thinking about going out West is to really think about what they are giving up here and to consider more than the financial gains.

“I usually say don’t do it. I tell them that if you really, really feel like you can’t do this and you are really struggling and you feel like you can give up this lifestyle... I’m not going to say that it’s not worth it because there really is money, it’s a lot easier. It’s so easy, you are basically handed money... It depends on the person and if you can handle giving up your friends and family and this lifestyle... I tell them to do it if they feel they need to, but know it’s not going to be like this place at all and emotionally it’s really hard.” (Returner, female)

“It’s hard work [on the oil field], difficult work, it’s dangerous work at times... I didn’t tell him not to come, but I told him to consider other options first and maybe look at more education or to come out and sleep on my couch for a week and I’d take him for a tour if he was really serious about it” (Leaver, male)

“They see a guy or girl in their middle 20s with income and a brand new car and they know they came out West and they know they did it. I think they see that and I think they want that. They want that right now and they know it’s attainable and they know things are still booming out here and it’s a very easy choice, a very easy justification to hop on that plane and come out here to chase that dream. There’s really no easy money back home. Out here you need grade twelve, a first aid course and self-contained breathing apparatus course and you can get on a rig for two and change a day and just push pipe around, work that for a year. You can’t come that at home, you can’t work 200 bucks a day anywhere with a grade twelve.” (Leaver, male)

5.4 Section Four: Views on the community and government

All eight of the participants responded to most questions in Section Four. This section is different from the other three in that, instead of focusing on the individual experiences of the participants, the questions here explore the attitudes within the community and government about rural youth migration.

Some interesting themes were present in the findings of Section Four. Here, participants offered some very real and thoughtful solutions based on their experiences of migration and growing up in the Valley. These solutions, I believe, prove the value of participatory research and should be yet another reminder to government and other leadership bodies that the true solutions to problems come only from those most affected by them. These solutions also give credit to the participants' encouragement that local governments make space for young adults on their committees.

Question one of these findings offers some insight into the stereotypes held about people who choose different migration paths (stayers, leavers, returners). It was found that every migration choice has both negative and positive stereotypes attached to it and stayers and leavers often had stereotypes that mirrored each other. For example, leavers were seen as ambitious while stayers were seen as lazy. Vice versa, stayers were seen as dedicated to their families and communities while leavers were seen as self-centered.

The most negative stereotypes seemed to be attached to people who stayed in the Valley and those who have worked in Alberta. Negative stereotypes of stayers included laziness and involvement with drugs. While negative stereotypes of people who work in Alberta were that they are "traitors", addicted to drugs, and greedy. This is an interesting

finding because for many Nova Scotians these two choices are the only options they may see for themselves, especially if they have limited education or are living in poverty.

Another concerning stereotype that was identified was the idea of returners as “failures” who came back to the Valley because they could not “make it in the real world”. This finding may have implications for the wellbeing of people who return as well as for the social narrative of the rural community that may view itself as substandard to urban areas.

Participants also felt that overall, the Valley was not a welcoming place for young people. Although there were exceptions including certain towns and organizations. Also in these findings participants stated that outward migration of youth should be something that rural communities should be concerned about and should put measures in place to make the area more appealing to young people.

Participants told me that there were numerous ways that the community could be more welcoming that could help support young people to stay. These suggestions included creating spots for young adults in municipal and town governments, ensuring that there are jobs in the area for students and creating community groups and programs for young adults to be supported in the community.

Participants also felt that there was a lack of interest from the provincial government in Nova Scotia to address problems faced by youth. Participants felt as though the government has put in place measure that may seem as though they are concerned with outward migration of youth and problems faced by youth who stay in rural communities, yet these measures only provide lip service without creating real change to the barriers that young people face. While participants felt that economic issues were the key reasons why young people leave rural Nova Scotia, they also stated that other issues need to be addressed, such as the cost of post-secondary education and community development.

Participants offered many solutions such as the need for mentorship programs that connect youth with young adults who have recently experienced some of these issues and tax breaks that may help young adults who are struggling to start families, pay student debt and enhance their quality of life while living in Nova Scotia.

5.4.1a Question one: Do you feel like there are stereotypes attached to young people who stay in or leave the Valley?

The inclusion of this question was influenced by the work of Looker (2001) and Malatest and Associates Ltd. (2002) in which community members were asked about their perceptions of youth and youth migration from their rural community. Participants in this study responded to questions about youth in both positive and negative ways with some stating that they feel the youth that stay in their rural community are “trouble makers” while those who leave are actively pushed to do so by their parents and community. Youth in this study also stated that they feel stereotyped by older adults in

the community and felt unwanted in their own community (Malatest and Associated Ltd, 2002).

This question was included in order to explore these stereotypes in the Valley. Not only can stereotypes affect the functioning of the community as a whole, but negative stereotypes of various migration choices will undoubtedly affect a person's image of themselves in the community.

All but one of the participants stated that they felt there were stereotypes attached to stayers, leavers, and returners. This participant was able to name some assumptions about stayers, leavers, and returners but felt that money was more of a factor on people's choices than being the "type" to leave or stay.

The stereotypes varied between participants and between migration decisions. For example, stayers seemed to have a less positive view of leaving than leavers did. There are both negative and positive associations about people who make each migration choice. Whether or not certain migration choice is positive or negative often "depends on who you ask" (Leaver, female) and this also true for our participants.

It should also be noted that, whether an attribute or description is positive or negative is a completely subjective choice in many cases. For example, two participants may give the example of a stereotype of someone who leaves to go to university, however one may see that as positive because the individual is getting an education while another may see that education as negative because it makes people think they are superior. In my analysis, stereotypes are categorized as positive or negative based on the context of the interview, assumptions made about structural issues, and of course the way the circumstance is presented by the participant.

To begin to explore the results of this question I will first outline the various positive and negative stereotypes for stayers, leavers, and returners. I will then point out the themes and connections that arise in relation to other information from the interviews.

5.4.1b: Describe the stereotype of someone who stays in the Valley.

Positive stereotypes of stayers

Only one person gave a solely positive account of the stereotypes that exist for people who stay in the Valley:

“For people who stay in the valley it’s one for two things. They are staying and going to university because they want to be close to home, they don’t want to move away, they are small town kind of people. Or its people who are going to the workforce or are taking over a family farm. A lot of people who are in my grade or the grade behind me are going into farming. Or go to the Agriculture College I would say. Or who just aren’t doing...not ‘not doing anything’, but who are keeping their job at McDonalds and already don’t live with their parents and they are just trying to pay rent and they live with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Those are the two types I would say: university and the people who kinda go to NSCC¹⁴ so they can get a job in the labour force here like mechanical or even LPN¹⁵ or something. That type of job.” (Leaver, female)

It is interesting to note that the idea of ‘not doing anything’ is still present in this more positive construct of stayers. Also relevant is the ways in which the quote above and the two presented below place a lot of emphasis on the positive qualities of stayers within their work.

¹⁴ Nova Scotia Community College

¹⁵ Licenced Practical Nurse

More commonly, participants identified both negative and positive qualities of stayers, as described by the stayer and leaver quoted below: “I think it’s different if someone is eighteen and leaving high school and staying at home. I think there is a bigger stereotype that’s bad. Than if they are twenty, if you look at the same person a few years later. They’re twenty and they’re working. Even though they didn’t go to school or anything like that, that’s ok. I don’t know what it is about those few years. But to me that’s how I see it. Its ok, they’re working they are more of an adult now.” (Stayer, female)

While the other two quotes above focus primarily on positive attributes connected to work, the quote below explores the positive attributes given to a stayer who is involved in the community:

“At the same time there are people who are very much community minded and have made a good spot for themselves and are strong for staying and working through it and making a life for themselves.”

(Leaver, male)

This quote also speaks from a place of understanding the struggle of “making a go of it” in the Valley.

Negative stereotypes of stayers

Six participants that represent all three of the migration choices stated that there are negative stereotypes attached to people who stay. There were three descriptions that seemed to construct the negative stereotypes of stayers.

Drugs

A stayer and a returner told me that there is a stereotype that young people who stay in the Valley use illegal drugs and that is seen as a very negative thing in the community.

“They are bums, they do drugs” (Stayer, female)

“They’ve got nothing going. A bunch of stoners” (Returner, female)

“They have to go get their methadone at the pharmacy” (Stayer, female)

Growing up in this area I can remember the stereotypes and misconceptions about drug use. Marijuana use is very common and often attached to it is the idea that the more rural a person is, the more likely they are to smoke pot. Going hand in hand with this I have also experienced a stereotype along with participants of this study, that it is primarily young, poor people who take part in drug use. Perhaps also related to these comments is the new found focus on prescription drug “mis-use” in the Annapolis Valley area and in other parts of Nova Scotia. In October of 2012 CTV investigative news program W5 released *Prescription for Tragedy* (2012). This report claims that an “opioid abuse epidemic” is taking place in the Annapolis Valley. One of the main reported meeting spots to sell prescription pills was a pharmacy and doctor’s office that offers methadone treatment. Aside from an undercover element, the report also focuses on the death of a young man in the Valley from prescription drug overdose at a house party.

Lack ambition

All but one participant stated that a “lack of ambition” is part of the stereotype against stayers. This may be shown by not attending post-secondary education, working an undervalued job at minimum wage, or just seen as being lazy.

“The people that are there who are our age they weren’t the people who went to university or anything like that, they barely got by school they work doing probably just regular minim wage jobs or something. They do drugs and stuff.” (Stayer, female)

“It seems like the people who stay in this area, stereotypically work at McDonald’s or do something like, they don’t do anything useful. Not that McDonald’s isn’t useful, you know what I mean, you know what I’m getting at? Like it doesn’t seem like they strive to do more or be a better person or get as far as they can. It seems like they are content to just be where they are, partying all night long, smoking weed, have their babies, but not have nice things in their house.” (Stayer, female)

“There are some of them that I think of as kind of lazy or unambitious and underachievers. They’re good people, but they’re not really pushing to do any better for themselves” (Leaver, male)

“Those who stay are going into trades or just go on to op instead of getting a degree and doing something big” (Leaver, female)

Not bright

Four people felt that the stereotype of young people who stay is often that they “aren’t bright” (Returner, female) either academically or when it comes to making good choices for themselves.

“I find a lot of young people just make stupid choices” (Returner, female)

“Most people use [the stereotype] as a negative. Like, ‘you didn’t go where ever. You must not be that bright” (Returner, female)

“It might be someone who may not have done so well in school” (Leaver, male)

Structural issues

One participant mentioned that there may be stereotypes that speak to structural barriers. For example: “Someone whose parent’s didn’t make a lot of money.” (Leaver, male) or the example cited above that a stayer might struggle in school. Although only one person brought this to light as a negative for leavers, structural issues do arise in other stereotypes.

Of all of the stereotypes, the negative descriptions stayers were most difficult for me as a researcher to hear. This is in spite of the fact that I am more aptly described as a leaver. I found many of these stereotypes were very harsh and often based on white, middle-class, Christian ideals and conservative values. I also have friends and family in the Valley who are stayers that do not match these stereotypes or these stereotypes do not consider their multifaceted situation.

The description of this stereotype by participants may also help us to understand various themes expressed by leavers. For example, the notion of “escape” makes sense when placed upon the backdrop of the stereotypes of people who stay in the Valley.

5.4.1c: Describe the stereotype of someone who leaves the Valley.

Positive stereotypes of people who leave the Valley

Four people mentioned positive stereotypes about leavers. The primary feature that encompasses all of the descriptions is that leavers are seen as ambitious. In many ways, these positive stereotypes form a mirror of the negative stereotypes of stayers; leavers are smart, want to better themselves, are well regarded in the community, and perhaps are even seen as brave.

“I think they are put on a pedestal. They’re so smart, they are the dream of what life should be. They’re doing more, they are trying, and they’re smart. They’re what you want your kids to be like when they grow up. You wish you were like that, that you could move away” (Stayer, female)

“I think and I don’t mean this to have a negative connotation for those who did stay, but I sort of have a stereotype of ambition for those who leave and I know that sounds, that implies that those who stay aren’t ambitious, that’s not what I mean. It seems like the Maritimers I meet out here are more the “let’s just get shit done right now” kind of types, or at least that’s how I see them. That’s not to imply that those who stayed aren’t ambitious, but it seems like it takes a kind of, almost selfish leap in the dark to come here” (Leaver, male)

“Probably someone who is smart. Someone who wants to better themselves, someone who wants to see the world. Someone who can’t wait to escape their family” (Leaver, male)

Negative stereotypes of leavers

The participant in this study told me that leavers are sometimes negatively described as being arrogant or being “traitors” for leaving. Many of these stereotypes seemed to be attached to working in the oil industry and attending university away from home.

“They describe people who leave the province as quitters or traitors or even arrogant. That they are too good to stay home and that really hurt to hear” (Leaver, male)

“That stereotype would be, ‘oh they’re too big for this town, they think they’re too good to go to Acadia, they want to be different’. I think that’s what I experienced at least.” (Leaver, female)

“‘Those crazy kids’, I don’t know. I am trying to think of ways to word it so I don’t sound like an awful person. I think some people see people who leave as either running away from their family heritage or, ‘oh, they must be gay or something and want to get away’” (Returner, female)

One conversation continues to come to mind when I think of the negative stereotypes attached to leavers. The participant quoted below has spent time out West and expressed some troubling emotion as a result of negative stereotypes of people who leave Nova Scotia.

“He said you were betraying your homeland by leaving and that really cut. That was pretty harsh...I think they sort of stereotype it like maybe the ship is going down, but the rats are the first ones off and we are all out here so we were getting off the ship” (Leaver, male)

In another part of the interview this participant explained that the metaphor of the rats running off the ship was one that he was confronted with by a co-worker while he was working out West. This vivid image has remained in my mind throughout this project and makes me consider the effect this may have on the Nova Scotia “culture of leaving” as describe elsewhere in this paper. One issue that this brings to mind is the way that the culture of leaving is translated into stereotypes held by people outside of the province and the ways this may impact young Nova Scotians working in other parts of the country.

5.4.1d: Describe the stereotype of people who return to the Valley after living away

It seemed hardest for participants to think of stereotypes for people who return to the Valley. As one participant said “it could be anybody” (Leaver, male). As with the other migration categories, many participants felt there were instances of both positive and negative stereotypes of returners.

Many participants are also very specific about what it means to go to Alberta and return to the Valley. It is clear by the data presented thus far that going to work in Alberta is a situation that has very specific stereotypes and judgments attached to it.

Positive stereotypes of returners

Unlike stereotypes for staying and leaving, returning as a positive or negative activity seemed to be linked to the length of time an individual has spent away and reason for leaving in the first place. For example, if someone has left and worked away through their young adulthood, returning is seen as positive. However, if someone has gone out West and worked for six months and returned that is seen as more negative.

“I think it depends how long they were gone too. Like if they were away for 10 or 20 years and move back its like, ‘oh they moved back to settle down, that’s so nice’ when they’re older. That’s the general impression I get.” (Stayer, female)

Interviewer: “So do you think going away, specifically to work out west and then coming back, people see that as being different then people going to university and coming back?”

Participant: “Yes, I think so because I think that university is education so, and although working can be educational as well, at university you aren’t making money you are spending money. I don’t know, maybe there shouldn’t be a difference between how we view going to different places for university versus work. But I dunno. Maybe it isn’t different, but I feel like it still is.” (Leaver, female)

It is also interesting to consider the stereotypes about returners that may be held by leavers. One leaver made the comment that, when people give up what they have in the West in terms of opportunities to go back home it is a hard thing to do.

“That one kinda strikes me because I have run into a few people who have come out here and go back. I really don’t understand. I get if you have kids or a family at home, but these are guys like me who are educated and not really tied down to a family or significant other back home and they’ve gone back. Homesickness. Why bother come out here? You made twenty thousand in a couple months so your bank account is a little padded, but you could have done that in a little longer time at home. This was sort of an experiment. But at the same time I envy it a bit, I do envy those who can come out here and have the discipline [to leave it]. I guess they are strong people in order to walk away from 150 thousand a year job and go home and make a third of that at a job just to be home. I think that takes a pretty strong person.” (Leaver, male)

This quote give an impression that it is valorous to leave behind the lifestyle that is possible in Western Canada. From a political economy and structural social work perspective this can be seen as an act of subversion to the neo-liberal regime. It is also interesting to consider the idea that it takes someone out of the ordinary to do something like leave behind the money in Alberta.

Negative stereotypes of returners

As with the other migration categories, there are negative stereotypes that are held about returners. The two main stereotypes that were shown in these interviews were that there may be a belief that returners are coming home because they failed (Looker, 2001; Malatest & Associates, 2002) as well as specific stereotypes about returners who are coming home from Alberta.

They failed

The idea that returners are coming home because they failed in the world or “couldn’t handle it” is something that was described by participants in this study as well in other literature about rural outward migration.

“Some people think that they failed. Some people think it’s great, but others think that they failed” (Leaver, female)

“I think that it’s probably that they couldn’t handle it, being away. They didn’t like it. Not like the people who maybe go out west to work. If they move away to work and then came back that seems ok. But I feel like if they go away... I don’t know. I feel like there is a stereotype maybe just because I did it, because I moved away and came back, so I feel like there might be this stereotype that oh they couldn’t handle moving away so they are back here.” (Returner, female)

I also experienced this sentiment when I lived in the Valley between degrees. I was often asked why I had come home or I was met with an “I told you so” kind of attitude that is reflected in the quote below. I felt as though the community felt that I did not reach my potential because I was back in the Valley.

“[They think] ‘oh they got out and got a taste of the world and realized it wasn’t as good as the Valley’ is pretty much how that goes” (Returner, female)

In the discussion chapter of this paper I will describe two ways in which the idea of returners as failures needs to be considered in order to better support rural communities and young people. The first is the possible frustration young adults may feel when returning or wanting to return to a community that views them as a failures. For example, in a small town your status as a returner is widely known. The second is the ways that the social narrative of a community is impacted when returners are collectively viewed as failures. In other words, how is the community impacted when it views itself as an area where only sub-par citizens would want to return?

Going to Alberta

As has been shown in these findings, going to Alberta has unique negative connotations in terms of stereotypes. This will be discussed more in later chapters. The quote below explains some of these feelings and fears about working in Alberta and in the oil industry specifically.

“I feel like they sell their soul. I have a lot of friends who have gone out West and worked and made a lot of money and spent a lot of money and come back big and rich and I think there is a huge issue with that. Because really though, you make a lot of money, but you spend a lot of money when you go away. It brings back a lot of negativity like drugs and this idea that oil is money; oil is gold. Like even when people say they are going out not to work on the rig but to do another job it’s like, but you’re still working for the oil company. That’s like a personal thing I guess.”

(Leaver, female)

One leaver who has worked out West has also experienced this when returning to visit the Valley:

“I’ve gone for lunch with certain people and at the end of lunch they go, ‘oh, you can pay for this with your dirty oil money. It’s the least you can do’. They kind of think we are out here and the money is just flowing out of us and we have forgotten what it is to be back home. It’s a total no win scenario” (Leaver, male)

Leaving to work in Alberta is a piece of not only the economic choices that young people make, but going to Alberta is also a cultural part of growing up in Nova Scotia and the rest of the Maritimes. Not only does this fairly large migration trend impact the workforce and other economic forces in Nova Scotia (Chaundy, 2012), but it also impacts the wellbeing of those who go and those who stay behind. It was often shown in the interviews for this study that going to Alberta to work was seen as a personal choice that often was reduced to the greediness or “money grubbing” (Returner, female) attitude of the individual. This example excludes the political economic understanding of migration and economic freedom as outlined in the theory chapter of this paper. Again, this is an issue that will be further considered in the discussion chapter.

Defending against the stereotype

From my own experience of returning for a brief time, I can attest to the need to defend against the stereotypes attached to returning. One participant also discusses her experience with this:

Interviewer: “It kind of sounds like you had to defend yourself against the stereotype”

Participant: “I did feel very defensive and sometimes I still do when people say they hate the city. It feels like they are attacking me. It was a huge part of my life. It’s like you are attacking me personally”

Interviewer: “Do you ever still get the feeling that people look at you as ‘one of those people’ who lived in the city? Do you feel like you are othered?”

Participant: “Yeah, sometimes. Not as often now that I’ve got a child, but before because I had a rather unique style, I guess. It can be very different from people who live here. I don’t have the valley drawl¹⁶” (Returner, female)

5.4.2: Question two: *Do you think the area is a welcoming place for young people like yourself? Why or why not?*

Overall, participants told me that there are both unwelcoming and welcoming aspects and physical areas of the Valley for young people. However, the degree of welcoming was often dependent on the “type” of young person.

One person stated that the Valley was a welcoming place for youth:

“Oh yeah. The thing about Nova Scotia is it’s all about the love. You don’t meet a whole lot of cranky people. Well you do meet cranky people, but mostly everyone is pretty chill” (Returner, female)

Similarly, only two participants (both men) told me that the Valley overall was unwelcoming to young people. Even from these two participants the degree that the area was unwelcoming was mitigated by the area of the Valley and the type of young person.

¹⁶ “The Valley drawl” refers to the spoken accent that people who grew up in the Valley sometimes have. It is sometimes used as a symbol of the working and lower classes, but is often adopted by everyone. Very similar to the now famous accents of the cast of the infamous Showcase T.V. show, Trailer Park Boys. However, it has its own distinctive qualities as well as sayings that make it unique.

“No. I really don’t think it is. I think Wolfville is kind of an anomaly, it’s kind of a young area. I think Wolfville is very charming and very friendly to youth. But outside of that I don’t think it is” (Leaver, male)

“I really don’t. I think in some circumstances, like if you wanted to own a hobby farm, it would be a great place” (Leaver, male).

One participant shared some of his experiences of feeling like an unwelcome outsider in his home community:

Interviewer: “Do you think the unfriendliness comes from being seen as an outsider, or a young person? Or even a young man?”

Participant: “I think it might be, maybe not necessarily a young man, but probably youth in general. There kinda seems to be a, ‘what are you doing here?’. It’s almost a feeling that they think I should be somewhere, but I don’t know where that would be. It’s just not here.” (Leaver, male)

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Similarity, only two participants (both men) told me that the Valley overall was unwelcoming to young people. Even from these two participants the degree that the area was unwelcoming was mitigated by the area of the Valley and the type of young person.

“No. I really don’t think it is. I think Wolfville¹⁷ is kind of an anomaly, it’s kind of a young area. I think Wolfville is very charming and very friendly to youth. But outside of that I don’t think it is” (Leaver, male)

“I really don’t. I think in some circumstances, like if you wanted to own a hobby farm, it would be a great place” (Leaver, male).

One participant shared some of his experiences of feeling like an unwelcome outsider in his home community:

Interviewer: “Do you think the unfriendliness comes from being seen as an outsider, or a young person? Or even a young man?”

Participant: “I think it might be, maybe not necessarily a young man, but probably youth in general. There kinda seems to be a, ‘what are you doing here?’. It’s almost a feeling that they think I should be somewhere, but I don’t know where that would be. It’s just not here.” (Leaver, male)

Another example is given of what it might feel like to a young person who is not “from” the Valley by this participant:

¹⁷ Wolfville is the home of Acadia University which brings over three thousand students into the small town during the school year. Wolfville also has a reputation of being more liberal minded and is home to a large farmer’s market, many organic and vegan restaurants, and lots of pubs.

“Go sit in a car across from [name omitted], pretty much the only bar going on there. watch the police drug busts, watch the fist fights and the yelling and the testosterone fueled bullshit that goes on with it and then imagine coming to this town and staying in New Minas and wanting to go out for a beer at 11 and witnessing that as an outsider. It doesn’t project any kind of friendly outreach. Walk through downtown Kentville on the sidewalk and just watch all the heads snap at you if you don’t look like you belong there. I don’t know it just seems a little frosty to outsider at first. There is definitely a friendly demeanor to tourism and stuff, but if you stay here longer than your vacation you might find it not so friendly. (Leaver, male)

Most people who said that they Valley has welcoming spaces for young people said that Wolfville was a good spot.

“Sometimes. Wolfville is really accepting. But once you leave there it is less accepting of younger people moving in” (Leaver, female)

Other communities are also mentioned as being not so welcoming for certain types of young people. However, this community will not be named in order to protect the identity of the participant.

“It would depend on the young people. [This community] is a lot of old people, a lot of really Baptist people and if you are the stereotypical family, they are very welcoming and warm. But if you were an alternative family this place would be awful” (Returner, female)

In the same vein, other participants explained that if a young person was looking at a certain career then the Valley would be a good spot.

“If you really wanted to own a winery or something it might be an inviting place. I think in certain niches it might be very inviting to some young people. But, generally speaking, I don’t think there is opportunity for young adults here in the Valley” (Leaver, male)

5.4.3a Question three: Do you think that the migration of young people from the area is one that the community needs to address? Do you think there are enough young people leaving that there should be concern?

Six of the eight participants told me that they believe the community should be concerned with the outward migration of youth from the Valley. Of the six participants who said that migration should be of concern to the community, a stayer and a leaver mentioned that this is a pressing issue because of the aging population of the area.

“Definitely, because what are we going to do if everybody leaves? We are going to have all these old people who are going to die off and nobody is going to be here. It’s just going to be a ghost town.” (Stayer, female)

“Because so many of us are going now and so many of us are deciding not to come back that we are getting top heavy, that there’s no 19-30 demographic is tiny or it seems to me to be tiny. I think we’re going to get to the point where we’re going to have to actively as a province decide whether or not we are going to offer incentives to promote immigration or returns, almost financial ones because we aren’t going to be able to run things there” (Leaver, male)

Other participants spoke about the way that young people may go into the world and get new experiences and opportunities that they may not want to give up in order to return home. Others say that the community should consider the issue because it is “really sad because I am sure that there are a lot of people who really would like to stay here, but they feel like they can’t” (Leaver, male).

Two participants, a stayer and a returner, felt as though the community does not need to be concerned because as people get older they want to return to the Valley.

“I don’t think so because all the people I know who have left want to come back once they grow up some” (Stayer, female)

Participant: “But overall the migration kind of balances itself out. Like once people start having kids and stuff they start to come back. It’s mostly nostalgia I think”

Interviewer: “Do you think there is an influx of people once they get a bit older?”

Participant: “Some or I am just discovering that they have always lived here” (Returner, female)

Although these participants are commenting on their own experience, the literature on youth migration in Canada does agree with their statements, although this work is somewhat dated (Dupuy et al., 2000; Looker, 2001; Malatest & Associates, 2002).

5.4.3b: What steps, if any, do you think the community should take to keep young people in the area or entice them to return? Here, community could mean anything from small community groups, municipal government, or townships.

Participants gave many suggestions on how the community could deal with issues around migration, primarily by keeping or attracting young people to the Valley.

Suggestions mostly fell into four main categories.

Jobs

Unsurprisingly employment was the most talked about solution that arose from the interviews. Within the theme of jobs, the age of retirement, student jobs and entrepreneurship were stated as issues to consider.

Participant: “Find a way to have more jobs. Retire some of those old geezers who don’t need to be around, you know what I mean? Who are just working for something to do, not because they are necessarily good at it anymore.”

Interviewer: “Do you think there are a lot of people who work just for something to do?”

Participant: “Oh yeah. I do. I think there are a lot of retired people who worked, retired, and then just go to Canadian Tire or back to teaching for example, just because they are bored. They just want something to do with their life and I feel like if they just went on vacation or just enjoyed their retirement. I think that’s part of the problem, the older people older baby boomers who just won’t retire. It’s just like, go away already so the young people can have some opportunities. I think that’s something that would be good. That’s my suggestions. (Stayer, female)

“Student jobs, especially in Kentville. If you want to work a summer job for like the parks department you pretty much have to be a family member

of someone who works there or who is on town council. Local student jobs are paid crap, to the point where some of them aren't worth bothering with. I'm not sure what they can do at a community level besides trying to promote entrepreneurship and small business. Downtown Kentville is looking like a zombie movie... I don't mean for someone my age to start a business, I really mean anyone. If a sixty year old wants to start a business in Kentville I think that give people our age somewhere to apply to at least, to have some hope that there are jobs going on here. I think that a generation of children raised by Michelin employees have been brought up to think that Michelin is not an option. No one my age I know with family members that work at Michelin wants to work at Michelin. We've been brought up by our parents that that is a far away option. So I think expanding Michelin is just going to hire unemployed forty and fifty year olds rather than attract twenty somethings. It's really difficult to say.”
(Leaver, male)

Community

Another example that was given by participants as a way to make the Valley more welcoming to young people was to put resources and support in place for community building. The quotes below speak to how building a sense of community through recreation and information could make the Valley more appealing to young people.

Participant: “Maybe more social groups where you can meet other families or events where you can go out and meet your neighbors and know who has kids”

Interviewer: “Outside of the church”

Participant: “Yeah because church is, you know, church not everybody goes and you don't meet everybody. Just the other day I saw a bunch of ladies walking with strollers and babies. But I don't know who they are.”

(Returner, female)

“Especially with sports and recreation activities for kids. They need to make it so people are more aware. You don’t know what’s going on unless you search. The rec website is hard to navigate, its confusing. They need to update things more and have them easier to navigate. Keeping up with technology and even putting posters up because that’s how people get to know things.” (Leaver, female)

Municipal and town government

As shown by the quotes below, many participants called attention to the role that various local government could play in making young adults feel more welcome.

Engaging young adults in the processes of these various governments was seen as one way to creating a welcoming tone overall, but also to begin to address some of the other concerns that participants had stated in this study.

“The government definitely, Kings County Council. They have the power to start making changes here. I don’t know much about the Village of Canning, but there are negative ideas about our generation like we are lazy or over educated or think we are better than everyone else and always have our faces in technology. I think that government have a huge role that they need to start playing. Canning needs a youth coordinator. Like hey we are having a kid’s day in the park or we will watch your kids for free while you get your groceries. Something like that. People think they can live on [Main Street] because it’s close to the school, but what else does Canning have?” (Leaver, female)

“Right. I think one of the most important things would be getting some young adults my age into more high profile positions of power within the community, like the Town of Kentville board or something like that. Just having our voice present in amongst the people who are making decisions I think would be a big thing. When I worked for the advertiser I covered a lot of these councils, like the Kentville Town Council and the municipality. It was all older people, almost exclusively, you know what I mean? So these are the kinds of people that are driving policy and the way we are thinking about our own communities. Our voices are getting left out and that doesn't bode well for us wanting to stay right? So I think that would be a really great thing to get some younger people into these kinds of positions. It's kind of like an intangible thing, right? There's just a certain way of looking at the world that someone my age will have that is different from an older person, it may not be a very obvious thing, but I think having that influence floating in the sphere of the community might bring about a subtle change in attitude that might not be immediately perceptible but would be significant”. (Leaver, male)

My own background in youth engagement in New Brunswick (Stymiest et al.,2011) was through St. Thomas University and the group Youth Matters (http://w3.stu.ca/stu/sites/cryar/youth_matters/index.aspx). One of the issues that I experienced through this work and is also present in the literature (Malatest & Associates, 2002; *Beyond Freefall*, 2008) is that organizations struggle to recruit young people to be in leadership positions when they view apathy coming from youth when it comes to their community. The quote below explores the responsibility that government and organizations have to make space for and recruit young people.

Interviewer: “So my second question on top of this is that we often hear that there should, from maybe people our age, that they should be listening to our voices, we should have a spot at the table. And the rebuttal that comes back is the door is open, why aren't you running? So is it the responsibility of municipality government or Town Council or the board of directors at C.A.P.R.E. should go out and actively seek youth or young people out and bring them into the process or do you think that our generation is a little apathetic and that’s not really the role of Town Council?”

Participant: “I don’t think our generation is apathetic. I just think our generation has so much more of a global view than that generation so our energies go into things that could be spread worldwide instead of our local communities. So I don't think apathy is the problem, we have lots of drive to do good things, it’s just not directed locally like it was for the previous generation. I'm not going to say that it's their responsibility, but I do think that if municipal councils and the like were taking an more active role to recruit and entice young people into those positions that would be great. Because I think there are a lot of passionate smart youth who would be willing to do something like that, it's just that with so many opportunities and outlets to put their energy maybe Town Council isn’t the first place they think to do so. So I'm not going to say it’s their responsibility, but I do think it would be a great thing if they were to do that.” (Leaver, male)

This issue is not a new one. In fact in other interviews youth engagement and the stereotype of youth apathy is one that surfaces often. Some participants echoed the comments above, saying that youth are engaged and are often stretched thin by their community work. Others told me that perhaps part of the reason that youth are disengaged is that they do not see a place for themselves in the community or the change

that needs to be made in their home towns is so great that they feel overwhelmed with the idea of making change. This topic of discussion continues throughout Section Four.

Education

Education as a way for small communities and government to support young people who may want to stay or return was another theme that arose from question three. The suggestions that were given on how education could be used to mitigate outward migration echoed the statements given in these findings about the need for mentorship between young adults and youth.

“I think maybe at a community level if we got into the schools a little bit with people who have gone and people who are still there and had a ‘Q and A’ at the end of the school year, or some kind of outreach where you could just email someone and ask what they did and why they did it to come out here might be just enough to give people better plans about it, it wouldn’t be such a leap in the dark... I feel almost hypocritical suggesting that, like oh someone needs to be there and talk to them and be a rock or embrace the community and try and help out and then here I am sitting in Calgary not doing that” (Leaver, male)

The quote above identifies one of the barriers to connecting youth and young adults: how do we offer guidance when the young adults with experience are no longer in the Valley? This problem will be taken up again in the discussion chapter where I will suggest some ways that young adults who are away could still play a role in supporting youth in their home community.

It was also stated that youth may need to get information about what careers would be profitable if they wanted to remain in the Valley:

“I think people need to be educated more about the things you can do here and the opportunities that are here for people.” (Returner, female)

Findings in Section Three showed that this may already be taking place in the school system through the work of guidance counselors. Some participants stated that they received a lot of information about local schools and job. However, it is clear that, as people age and gain more experience, the way they think about staying in the Valley changes. Perhaps there need to be opportunities for young adults to more easily access information about what is available in the Valley as they grow.

5.5.4a Question four: At the provincial level, do you think that the government is taking action to support young people? This could be currently or in the past.

Seven out of eight participants stated that they felt the provincial government is not taking action to support young people in Nova Scotia. A returner abstained from the question. Most people told me that the measures that are in place for young people in Nova Scotia pay more lip service to the idea of supporting young people than really impacting the lives of young adults

“I think there is a lot of talk and a lot of noise being made, but I don’t feel like it’s anything meaningful and I don’t think it’s anything that has any kind of short term, or long term solution for that matter. I just feel like it’s unfocused” (Leaver, male)

“I think they are taking measures that look like they support young people. Like the ship building contract of Canada Jobs.ca. Initiatives that look really good and they’re spending lots of money putting it out there.” (Leaver, female)

5.4.4b: What do you think the provincial government should do to address the issues that young people face in Nova Scotia?

In this part of the question participants offered some very interesting responses and solutions. Although some participants found it a difficult question to answer, those who had expressed interest in staying or returning to the Valley were very specific in the measures that they believed could help them live in Nova Scotia.

Monetary incentives

Two leavers and a returner told me that some sort of monetary incentive would ease the transition back to Nova Scotia. It was suggested that these could come in the form of tax breaks, higher wages, or just more job opportunities.

“I think we are going to get to a point where we’re going to have to actively, as a province, decide whether or not we are going to offer incentives to promote immigration or returns, almost financial ones because we are going to be able to run things here” (Leaver, male)

“That’s such a hard question. I think, it seems so cynical, but I think so much of it comes down to economics. There aren’t enough economic opportunities for someone like me to stay here. I want to stay here, but it just doesn’t seem feasible to me.” (Leaver, male)

One returner who spoke about monetary incentives was speaking from her perspective of raising a young child while her husband works out West.

“Higher pay for trades. More tax breaks for having kids. I get one hundred dollars a month to take care of [the baby]. That isn’t very much. The more

you make, the more taxes you pay. Which I understand. But it also makes it much harder. Like if you are even at the bottom of one tax bracket you are paying much more than if you were at the top of another [lower one] and be doing a lot better. I don't know how it would work, but more divisions in tax brackets because being at the bottom of a high tax bracket, you're screwed basically...Because when you are just out of university you have all that debt and trying to start a family and look for jobs that don't exist, it's just impossible to get ahead" (Returner, female)

Community building

Although the monetary incentives suggestion was given the most, other participants offered more unique ideas on how the government can show more support to young adults. One participant stated "they need a community to build a relationship with" (Leaver, female). She also mentioned that idea of a community development worker who could work within the community to organize events and services for people in the community. I believe that such a person could work in a participatory action model to identify key issues for young people, much like this study attempted to do. This is one clear way that social work could play a role in supporting communities who are struggling with outward migration. In other parts of the interview this participant also suggested that more support to non-profits who want to offer internships or summer jobs to young people.

Political visibility

One really interesting suggestion was that politicians need to be more visible and accessible to young people. The quote below is one participant's reflection on how the

visibility and perceived interest of politicians in youth issues changed the way she thought about politics when she was a teen:

Participant: “I don’t know as much. What I remember is watching Much Music when I was like sixteen and Jack Layton came to Much Music, ok? I was like, the NDP cares about young people. He was talking about caps on student loans or something, whatever he had to talk about had to do with education and I was like, ‘oh, this is good’. So ever since I saw Jack Layton on Much Music when I was sixteen I thought, ‘ok the NDP cares about young people’, for that one reason. At the provincial level... I try to make at least an educated vote, at least in terms of things that affect me like education... If they were they would be on Much Music, they would be going to universities, they’d be going to bars or something. They’d be having events where young people are because that got in my mind. Jack Layton is on Much Music, he’s a politician, and he’s running for prime minister, he obviously cares about young people and getting them involved.”

Interviewer: “That’s a great story. I think it makes a lot of sense”

Participant: “It made a big impact on how I view the NDP party now”

Interviewer: “So what you are saying is that you don’t think the government is doing all they can. One way that you know that is that you don’t see them where you are?”

Participant: “Yeah, you don’t see them. But, I think they just need to get young people excited about it. Like hold a rally or something at universities and even high schools because I think that if they start to attract people when they are fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, like that’s good because they are going to pay more attention and feel more educated at least when they go to vote when they are eighteen. I think that’s an issue also. I think they need to be where the young people are if they want their vote. I just don’t think they care a whole lot about young people.” (Stayer, female)

Although the story about Jack Layton is concerned with federal politics and country-wide media, it speaks to the idea of making politicians and the political field visible to the fifteen to thirty crowd in Nova Scotia. This echoes the sentiment of a leaver in response to a different question:

“The whole baby boomer generation, which is a big cohort of people still take most of these [political] positions. It’s kind of like, this isn’t specifically in regard to the Valley, but it’s this thing where this cohort of people have driven policy and discussions so long past the time that generally speaking those people would hold the most power. It’s such a large group of people that held on to the main sway of discussion, maybe longer than would traditionally have happened with a cohort like that... So I think that’s a thing and it’s a viscous cycle where this kind of thing leads to outward migration of youth and the outward migration of youth leads to a situation where there aren’t a lot of young people to take up these positions” (Leaver, male)

This discussion indicates that some participants of this study feel disconnected with current politics, which is something that has been of discussion for some time now in terms of low voter turnout by young adults. What is described here seems to be a level of ignorance to what young people need from government in order to allow them to stay and prosper in Nova Scotia. This is aptly explained by a participant quote below:

Interviewer: “Do you think the government or policy makers really understand what it is like to be a young person in Nova Scotia?”

Participant: “Absolutely not. Politicians by and large come from wealthy families or have made themselves wealthy. They do not have to worry about student debt. My husband has debt and it’s hard to get ahead. You are paying mortgages, taxes, utilities, for a vehicle, and it’s so difficult. Politicians and policy makers don’t have to feel that because they don’t have to struggle with the financial part.”

Interviewer: “It sounds like it would be impossible for you and your husband to have a house, a child, and have home work here.”

Participant: “Yes. We did the numbers once and I would have to get a job that pays forty thousand dollars a year just to break even. Just break even! Not paying off debt, nothing. Just paying the bills. So we decided we would be stressed all the time, it would be awful. [We thought] ‘Just go out West.’” (Returner, female)

This ignorance, according to the participants quoted, come from a disengagement with young people in the area and also a lack of understand the way it feels to live in this particular place and time. If we view these comments along with those made in question three, it is clear that this issue is one that needs further exploration and thought.

5.4.4c: Recently there has been some attention paid to issues of migration and joblessness by the Nova Scotia government including the Ships Start Here¹⁸ and jobsHere¹⁹ programs and the creation of the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism²⁰. Are you aware of these measures? If yes, do they impact your own plans around migration?

¹⁸ Nova Scotia’s response to the Government of Canada’s National Ship Building Procurement Strategy (Ships start here, 2013)

Of the three programs mentioned in the question it was only the Ships Start Here program that all of the participants were aware of. This is not surprising as the publicity surrounding the procurement of the ship building contract was widely publicized in Nova Scotia. Only two people (a leaver and a returner) were aware of the Jobs Start Here program. All of the participants told me that they did not know about the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism or the mandate of this department within the Nova Scotia provincial government.

Several participants commented on the Ships Start Here program. Only one person told me that it make an impact on her choices about migration. Overall, this was the only person to state that programs like this impact their migration choices.

“I feel like the ship building does [impact my choices]. The department makes me feel more like they care about this area, that they care about wanting people to stay” (Stayer, female)

However, other participants told me that they feel the ship building program does not address their concerns about staying in or returning to Nova Scotia.

“While I think those are probably a good step and while I think those will probably help a number of people I think they stop too short and I think their focusing too heavily on pushing thing to the rural and focusing too heavily on trades. The Ships Start Here program isn’t going to start for years, mostly they need engineers and thousands of welders and crane and truck operators to make those boats. Those guys are already out west and they’re going to make more money than they would at home. I don’t think

¹⁹ “Is the plan to create good jobs and grow the economy” (Province of Nova Scotia, 2013)

²⁰ Province of Nova Scotia, 2012

as many are going to come back from that. I think a few years out its probably right for people just graduating and going to N.S.C.C. to jump right into it, but I think they're going to end up importing labour from Quebec and Vancouver from other ship yard because they won't be able to fill it." (Leaver, male)

Participant: "No. [My husband] was going to apply to the ship yards, but when you look at the numbers you pay your own way down to Halifax every day and back. You don't make terrible money, but not anything more than you would make in the Valley and you are paying more for gas, for food. You have to join the union."

Interviewer: "It sounds like the Ships Start Here is not bringing him home, and the idea of it was to bring people home"

Participant: "No, it doesn't pay enough to warrant driving an hour back and forth every day. A lot of city electricians have tons of work and they can manage that because they are so close. But it wouldn't be worth it for [my husband] to work there" (Returner, female)

"You hear about them, but I don't know anyone who has benefited. I don't know anyone who works with Ships Start Here." (Stayer, female)

Aside from these concerns, other participants discussed how programs like Ships Start Here do not and cannot impact their migration choices because these programs focus on jobs for people with trades or other technical training.

"Not really any of these would. Jobs Here means nothing to me. It's like jobs for electricians or construction workers. That's what I see for Jobs Here or Ships Here. As a [person with a B.A.] the only way that would affect me would be if I was part of decision making or met the love of my

life and that person was a ship builder” (Leaver, female)

“No. They don’t seem to have any relevance to my situation at all. Like the ship building is in no way related to my field of work” (Leaver, male)

In this discussion two people referred to the actions taken by the Dexter government to decentralize key civil servant jobs into rural areas of Nova Scotia in the spring of 2012. Although described by the government as a way to bring good jobs to rural communities, these participants felt that it did not make a positive impact.

“There’s rural development when they decentralized the departments in Halifax I think about half of those people quit and took early retirement. There’s a reason certain jobs are in urban environments because people want to have an urban lifestyle and work those jobs. If you push those to a rural area you’re killing the lifestyle that came with that job. You might fill it with someone in a rural area, but your net job gain is zero because someone has quit in an urban environment to give up that job.” (Leaver, male)

5.4.4d: These measures focus on economic security. Do you think there are issues other than economic ones that policy makers should consider?

All of the participants answered that, while economic issues may be the most important, there are other things that the provincial government in Nova Scotia could consider to support young people who want to stay or return.

“Probably not. It’s important, but just all the stuff they’ve done, we still haven’t seen a difference. So maybe there needs to be more, or even different things [addressed]” (Stayer, female)

Participants gave a few suggestions on what could be considered outside of economic security to help young people stay in Nova Scotia.

Community programs and development

The participants quoted below told me that community programs would and places where they could become involved in the community would be one issue outside of economics that could be considered to help mitigate migration.

“Community development. Having programs or things youth can be involved in. If I have a job here I am more likely to stay here or if the economy is doing well here. But, if I have a job here that is connected to my interests. I think economic security is a huge part of why people leaver, because if you’re not making money you have to go somewhere that will give you money. If there is stuff for me to do here and things that I enjoy here then I am going to want to stay, and that is exactly what I will be doing” (Leaver, female)

“Yes. I definitely think economic ones are the most important, but obviously there is much more to it. I think providing opportunities for young people to feel like they are making a positive impact on their communities. Like I said, there are tons of people with all kinds of energy they are willing to put out and they are going to expend that energy somewhere. If they don’t see a place in their local community to expend that energy they are going to go somewhere else.” (Leaver, male)

Education and student debt

One participant stated that having programs and initiatives to lower student debt would be very helpful for those who want to stay in Nova Scotia and start a family. She also reflected on how the cost of post-secondary education will affect people in Nova

Scotia in the long term.

“Education, post-secondary education should not cost what it costs. It’s become a luxury and it shouldn’t be. Somewhere in Europe it’s free, and that’s fantastic. You get far more educated people who can help create jobs and be qualified. Whereas here there’s so many unqualified people. There’s so many lower income families whose kids won’t get a post-secondary education. They will be stuck in service jobs forever, it’s like they are creating castes of people and that shouldn’t be how it works in a developed country like ours, well anywhere” (Returner, female)

Another participant suggested that there should be more information available and more support given to occupations that do not necessarily need a degree or a lot of post-secondary training to do.

“I would definitely recommend that they promote the community college and universities and even just employment opportunities right out of high school. I don’t know what you do right out of high school. I guess you could be a fisherman, you don’t have to go to school for that. So if they advertise the fishery as a good place to work, maybe it would attract people to come out here...So you could attract people who just want to go to work” (Stayer, female)

Rethinking the focus on the economy

In response to this piece of question four, one participant stated that it might be beneficial to rethink how the province attracts people and jobs to rural areas. She suggests that marketing rural Nova Scotia as a good place to raise a family might also bring more employers to the area because they see that there is infrastructure available to

ensure that people can stay in the area to fill jobs:

Participant: “I think that if they marketed this area to the rest of the world or the rest of Canada. It’s a small town feeling, it’s a great place to raise your kids. I think that would attract young families to come here and I think that would bring the opportunities with it because if there are more people here there are going to be more jobs. That’s how I see it. If there are people there is going to need to be more industry”

Interviewer: “So bring people here first?”

Participant: “That’s just my idea. It would be nice. If there’s no people here they aren’t going to bring the jobs here because there is nobody here to fill them, right?” (Stayer, female)

Although this suggestion may seem counterintuitive, especially considering that it is opposite to what is the current strategy in Nova Scotia, the idea does raise some interesting points. The first being that Nova Scotia has an aging population that is coupled with outward migration (Chaundy, 2012). This stayer is right when she stated that it may be hard to attract business into this type of workforce situation. Secondly, she advises that marketing the small town feel to families might be a good idea. Nova Scotia has long been marketing itself as a tourist destination. However, how have we been doing marketing ourselves as a good place for people to live, especially building off of the trappings of the rural idyll? These points could be valuable ways to look at the current economic climate of Nova Scotia in a new way.

5.5 Chapter five: Conclusion

The findings of this study offer insight into a large variety of experiences at two distinct times in the lives of participants: at the end of high school and in young

adulthood. The data collected is varied and offers just a glimpse of what migration may mean for young adult Nova Scotians.

In Chapter Six I offer some discussion on just a few of the themes that surfaced in the findings of this study.

6. Chapter Six: Discussion

As the responses given by the participants of this study show, migration is an issue that is deeply personal, emotional, and unique to each person's circumstance, life goals, and lifestyle. It is also clear that the migration of young people from Nova Scotia is one that deserves the attention of government, community, and academia in order to sustain the beautiful and vibrant communities in the province. This study intended to add to the literature on rural youth migration in Canada, as well as begin the discussion at the local and provincial levels in a more focused, youth driven way.

I believe it is important to reiterate that, while this study values rural communities and what they offer to the fabric of Canada, supporting youth in their choices should be at the heart of the discussion on youth migration. I do not want this study used to pressure youth to stay in their rural community, rather to allow youth to make the choice about what is best for them in terms of education, career, family, and residential preference.

In this chapter I offer some remarks on the limitations of this study, the way that participatory action research was used as the research methodology, and the way that political economy and structural social work theory were used in order to contextualize and understand the lived experiences described by the participants. Next, I provide some discussion of four of the themes that arose consistently within the findings of the interviews.

6.1 Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study that should be addressed. One of the limitations that I have found particularly relevant for this study is that I currently live

outside of the Valley. I chose to complete my MSW in Ontario and therefore had to travel back to Nova Scotia in order to do this research. Being a leaver myself allowed me to relate to the challenges that young adults face in making migration choices. However, living such a significant distance away from the community meant that all of the preparation for the research took place in isolation from community members and the current issues they face. Why this is problematic for participatory action research will be discussed later. However, for me this meant that my time in the community was limited and required that the research be done fairly quickly.

6.1.1 Researching as student

Conducting research as a student presents challenges as well as comforts. As a student, I was lucky to have access to wonderful supervision and support. I was also fortunate to complete this project in a school of social work that values participatory action research and is home to academics who have been doing and writing about this kind of research for a long time. Their guidance and knowledge has been extremely valuable for this study and for any changes that might result.

Below I consider a few of the limitations of this study as a result of researching as a student.

6.1.1.1 Time

The first challenge is the short timeline that must be followed in order to complete research within a specific academic program. Although there was some flexibility that I was able to take advantage of, there were time constraints that limited the scope and depth possible for this study. For example, I was only in the Valley for six weeks. This meant that data collection, the construction of the interviews, and recruitment had to take

place within this limited window of time. This impacted the number of participants that could be interviewed and the time I could spend working face-to-face with the advisory committee.

6.1.1.2 Power imbalances

As a student I had to be aware of the various power imbalances that were taking place within the preparation and execution of this research. In some situations, including the interviews and the work with the advisory committee, I needed to be aware that as an MSW student I had or may have been seen as having power over others involved. As a researcher and a person with privilege, as evidenced by my education status and being a white, heterosexual woman, I tried to balance this power differential by being clear about the objectives of the research, validating the experiences of those involved and articulating the ethical constraints and considerations that I had taken and continue to take to keep participants and the advisory committee safe from harm (Appendix B).

I also had to be aware of the situations in which my status meant that I had little power. One example of this was in trying to work with the local school board. Being a student and a young person myself, meant that I had little power to advocate for this research project. Moving forward with any action as a result of this research I expect that this may also be an issue when it comes to advocating for change in government and communities.

6.1.2 Changing plans

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the methodology for this research was forced to change midway through the project because I was denied my request to work within the local school board. This affected the project in a few different ways.

The first effect was that I was unable to meet with those seventeen to eighteen year old youth who are currently making choices about migration. Originally, I had planned to hold focus groups with this age group to cover questions that were discussed in Section One and three of the final interview. Although the actual participants of this study were able to give adequate responses to these questions, they do not necessarily replace the unique perspective of those who are presently making these choices. By not including this group for this, and other reasons, meant that the voices of high school students were missing from the advisory committee and the ability of this project to act as a consciousness raising experience for high school students was also missing from this work. This is important especially considering that the participants of this study told me that they were not thinking of the long-term results of their migration choices when they were eighteen.

Another part of the original plan for this study was to speak to guidance counselors themselves about the advice and support that they give to youth who are trying to make plans for their lives after high school. Although the views and experiences of the participants should not be diminished, having the perspective of guidance counselors themselves would have added to this study and to the overall discussion about how youth can be better supported in their migration choices.

Working with the local school board would have also added an important piece to this study because conceivably a dialogue would have been opened within the school board about the ways that migration issues could be addressed within rural high schools. It perhaps would have made action for change in high schools easier. Also, the fact of having a study like this taking place within the school board, would have, at the very

least, allowed for some discussion to occur about the issue of migration and its impact on the school community in the Valley (Van de Sande & Schwartz, 2011).

It is my hope along with that of the advisory committee, that the local school board receives a copy of this study and that the information provided here will be a starting point for discussion. It is rare that small rural schools have access to research specific to their own community and we hope that this can be useful to them and the students in the area.

6.1.3 Time of year

Perhaps one of the most interesting limitations of this study is the impact that the time of year had on the entire project. The data collection for this study was to take place originally in late May and early June. The chief reason the local school board could not allow me to complete the project within the local high school was because of the busyness of May and June as students and faculty prepared for final exams and graduation. In hindsight, this is something that I should have recognized at the outset of the project, however due to the allotted time for Masters students to complete their projects, this was the only time I was able to do the work.

In small communities like this many people are involved in the school community. As I began to recruit participants within the community it was clear that the graduation season reached far beyond the walls of the high school. Coaches, bus drivers, community volunteers, and even local business people told me that they had to decline to take part in this study because they were simply too busy. That this was so helps to

illustrate the interconnectedness of a small community and the central role that the local school plays as a hub for community activities.

Another significant way that conducting research at this time of year impacted the study was in participant demographics. While researching in June made it possible to connect with young adult participants who were home visiting from university, it made it difficult to connect with people who work and live in the Valley year round. For example, there were only two men represented in this study and they were both leavers. I had connected with several men (both stayers and returners) and they were interested in participating, however the two week span in which the interviews took place were also the warmest and sunniest of the spring and summer – which meant that haying²¹ season was in full swing. Not only did this mean that many people who work in the agriculture sector were busy, but individuals who own hobby farms, have families with farms or are neighbors to farmers lend a hand at this time of year –even I drove a hay wagon in between interviews! To me, this example speaks to one of the strengths of rural communities

6.1.4 Limitations of fully embracing P.A.R.

As stated briefly in the methodology chapter, there were challenges to embracing participatory action research fully within this project. As defined by Van de Sande and Schwartz (2011), participatory action research ideally involves the participation of community members at every stage of the research: from issue identification, to data

²¹ “Haying” is the process of cutting, drying, bailing and storing the winter feed requirements for cattle and other animals. This often takes a lot of manual labour and time.

collection and analysis, and the final writing and release of a report. This project came about as a result of my own research interests as a social work student and therefore, although based on my own experience as a rural person and a “leaver”, the outward migration of youth was not an issue that the community specifically identified for this study.

The involvement of community members in data collection was limited to the work of an advisory committee and, because of the nature of a MSW thesis project, none of the data collection was completed by members of this team. In the future, I believe that this method would be ideal for studies such as this one. I believe that being a young adult and a member of this community, as well as a person known to the participants allowed for a level of trust and understanding that would not have been possible had I been an outsider. Having other young adult community members and individuals of different migration status trained to do this type of research and interviewing would certainly be a bonus for the community and future research projects, but it would also allow for data collection that is more in tune with the community and other possible participants.

During the analysis and report writing phase of this project there was very little input from the advisory committee and other community members. This is because most of the work was done in Ottawa and because a thesis project requiring this type of work must be done by the thesis candidate. Another barrier to this type of participation was the fact that advisory committee members themselves are in different locations in Canada and have other projects, jobs, and schooling on the go. While there was communication throughout this phase between myself and the advisory committee, I believe that having

different perspectives available for use in the analysis can only benefit any type of research.

All of the advisory committee members are people that I have known for a long time and in different capacities. I think that the committee members agreed to take part in the committee because of a genuine interest in me and the research question and most gained valuable experience and insight from the project. I acknowledge that my personal relationships with these individuals (and their relationships with each other) could have had an impact on both their ability to and comfort in sharing their opinions as committee members. However, over the course of this project I don't believe that this had significant impact on our work together or on the final results. As our work together continues this remains a consideration that must be taken into account.

Moving forward, the advisory committee has offered suggestions for possible action based on the findings of this project and most of the members have stated that they would like to be involved in data dissemination and any further work that is done based on this project. I will be contacting them to review this document before defending it as a thesis project, as well as in the upcoming months to organize action based on the findings.

6.1.5 Demographic limitations

Eight participants took part in this study, four leavers, two stayers, and two returners. Six participants were women and two were men. One of the main demographic limitations of this study is the lack of male participation. A few reasons were noted above to address the challenge to get male stayers and returners to take part; their voices could have added new perspectives and solutions to this issue. Men and women experience

rural (Valentine, 1997) and migration (Looker, 2001) in different ways. These differences are missing from this study.

The original methodology of this study would have involved the inclusion of high school students, young adults, guidance counsellors, and other community members in the research. Although hearing the stories of young adults about their experiences of migration was a powerful part of this study, there could have been some benefits to the original research design. For example, a greater number and variety of people involved in the study would have helped community buy in and could have opened more doors to disseminate the study's results. . It also would have added depth to discussions about the perspectives of older adults on migration, the role of guidance counsellors in migration, and stereotypes held about migration in the community.

There is little research on the topic of rural outward migration in Canada. Future studies should therefore focus on the perspectives of a variety of rural people in order to really understand this issue.

It is important to remind the reader again of the nature of my relationships with the participants of this study and described in Chapter Four. This may have impacted the participant's choice to take part and the answers they gave in the interview. For example, they may have wanted to provide answers that they felt I was looking for or answers that would hide an experience that they would not want to share with a friend. While every precaution was taken to make participants feel comfortable, these considerations as limitations to the study must be stated.

6.2 Participatory action research

As stated above there were limitations to the way that participatory action research (P.A.R.) could be fully embraced in this research. Nevertheless, using P.A.R. methodology was both sound research practice and a powerful experience for myself and the advisory committee. As a researcher, I valued the sense of community that was created during our time together and the drive for change that continues as I consult with the advisory committee during the final stages of writing this thesis. Undertaking this work as a group of young people interested in the experiences and wellbeing of rural youth and young adults was an incredibly powerful experience.

During our final in person meeting after the data collection was completed we had the opportunity to reflect on the process and possible plans for action. Four main questions or issues were addressed in this final meeting.

6.2.1 Overall, how did you feel about the P.A.R. process?

“I feel like we did our job. I was really interested in what you were doing and it was fun to be part of the process” (Advisory committee member)

“I think it’s a perfect way to do research. I never want to do research any other way” (Advisory committee member)

Generally, the advisory committee members told me that they enjoyed being part of the committee. While we all felt as though the beginning stages of the process were a bit chaotic, it was reported by members of the advisory committee that they felt we reached the goals that we had set out before the data collection process had begun.

Committee members stated that the most enjoyable part of this process was constructing and discussing the interview questions. Committee members told me that they felt as though the questions were enriched by the participation of the team. As a researcher, I valued the perspectives and experiences of others because it allowed me to

be more reflexive about my own position. This allowed me to use examples of feelings and experiences that were not my own, or even opposite to my own in a way that I felt was useful to participants during the interviews.

6.2.3 How has taking part in this process changed your perspective on the issue of youth outward migration?

Many of the advisory committee members expressed that being involved in P.A.R. allowed them to look at the issue of rural outward migration in different ways. In our final meeting we discussed the way this method allowed us as community members, migrants, and researchers to understand the different ways that we individually understand an experience that we all have in common. For other committee members taking part in this process meant that they had time and space to reflect on their own experiences and feelings about migration both as they experienced them when leaving high school and as they continue to experience them throughout adulthood.

“I am much more aware of the intricacies of the issue now, having gone through the [participatory action research] process. Especially having [completed] an interview myself, it crystallized some of the abstract thoughts and feelings I had been having around staying and leaving”
(advisory committee member)

Committee members also reflected on how this process has made them see their experiences as something that is shared with others, instead of something that just happened to them in isolation. One committee member described in her own words the way that her personal experience became political:

“I’ve always thought about it. But, like, I thought I was the only one who had trouble with the guidance counsellor. After this I was like, ok, maybe I wasn’t alone in that. It’s like, now we have proof. Things to back it up. Maybe something can change, or start to change. Change the emotional levels students have about staying and leaving” (Advisory committee member)

What was really interesting about the responses to this particular question was the way that committee members became aware of both the universality of their experiences as well as the difference that social position and other factors make in how individuals experience migration. This is a good example of the usefulness of the dialectical approach of structural social work. By incorporating modern and post-modern ideas (Mullaly, 1997), we are able to understand that advisory committee members can go through a process of consciousness raising around what experiences in a certain situation are shared and in what ways this shared situation is interpreted and experienced differently based on a myriad of factors. The usefulness of the dialectical approach of structural social work will be discussed further in this chapter.

6.2.4 What was challenging about this process? What would you change if we were to do this again?

While the advisory committee members stated that the experience was very positive, there were a few things that we discussed that we might do differently if we had the option to do this type of research again. First, committee members told me that P.A.R. was, for them, a very new way of doing research. They stated that in the beginning phases they were unsure of their role as advisory committee members and how the project as a whole would play out. The general feeling was that this was better understood after our first meeting. Although I had prepared a P.A.R. fact sheet and an explanation of the roles and expectation for myself and the advisory committee members (Appendix C), it was only clear once we had discussed it in person. From my experience with other P.A.R. projects, this is often a challenge for researchers and committee members. This could be because the fundamental philosophy of P.A.R. differs so much from mainstream, empirical approaches to research.

Another area of discussion based on this question was the benefits and disadvantages of constructing some of the interview on a one-on-one basis. At the point in time when the interview questions were being finalized it became necessary for me to meet one-on-one with advisory committee members because time constraints and individual schedules made it impossible to gather together. As a group, we saw both positive and negative outcomes to this situation. It met our needs for timely completion of the interview questions and gave me the opportunity to get to know members of the team. We could also talk more frankly about our own migration experiences and this also ensured that each committee member got the opportunity to be heard. Negatively however, this type of consultation meant that there was no opportunity for disagreement or the sharing of different perspectives in the moment. During our last face to face committee meeting one

committee member reflected on how useful tension can be when working with a group, especially when it comes to pushing ourselves and each other to see past our own experiences. As a group we felt as though there could be a way to balance these concerns in the future.

Although not specifically something that advisory committee members would change, we also spoke about the impacts of having only young adults on the advisory committee. Overall, we felt as though we made the right decision not to try harder to recruit other community members to the committee. However, having other perspectives and values would have made the process different, which is an important point to reflect on. Having others on the committee may have brought in perspectives of key players such as municipal government, teachers, and adult allies that may have informed our questions differently or may have helped us in formulating a plan for action. It also would have helped to notify a larger section of the community of the fact that this study was taking place.

One participant reminded us of the process that we undertook to make this choice:

“We went through the process of the advisory committee without [older adults and other community members] and it went well. And you are interested in how youth experience [migration]. So, having an advisory committee as all youth, even though it wasn’t the original plan, it just reflects the research even more.” (advisory committee member)

Indeed, having an advisory committee of all young adults meant that we were able to take ownership of our experiences and use them in a way that made sense for us. As one young adult committee member stated,

“No one can argue that this research doesn’t reflect the voice of young adults, because it is literally entirely the voice of young adults!” (advisory committee member)

6.2.5 What action would you like to see take place as a result of this study?

More complete ideas on possible action based on advisory committee input will be discussed later in this chapter and in the conclusion of this thesis. However, there are a few key ideas that came from the final meeting of the advisory committee. The main issue that the advisory committee identified for action was for high school students to receive advice from a range of experience. For example from young adults who have experienced going out West. The advisory committee felt as though that this advice needs to be presented in a way that is attractive to youth and is different from the format and advice that they receive from guidance counsellors. It was also suggested that technology such as email and Google Hangout could be useful in facilitating this kind of interaction. Technology could allow young adults from the Valley who are now living in other parts of the world to connect with youth who need more information about choices that would take them away from the Valley.

Another key topic of conversation around possible action based on this study was the barriers that we face as an advisory committee and researcher who are primarily leavers. We felt that our collective status as leavers illustrates the problem of rural youth migration and the emotional situation of feeling connected to a community that we are away from. We also discussed how our exodus disrupts what could be the natural progress of young adults through different positions in rural society. As one committee member said,

“Instead of becoming leaders in our rural community, at eighteen we leave and expend our energy elsewhere”

We were also cautious, as leavers, about how the community would receive this study and our ideas for change because we may no longer be seen as being part of the community.

At the point of our final meeting basic ideas for change were centred on young adult mentorship to youth, government grants for students to work in rural communities, and working toward innovative economic ideas that go beyond trades to create sustainable jobs for university graduates who want to return home. Overall, we hope that bodies such as the municipal government, the local school board, and town councils will consider the data collected in this study and our ideas for action based on the data. We hope that the community will see this study as a heartfelt piece of work undertaken by young people who value their home community.

6.3 The role of theory in understanding rural youth migration: Political economy and structural social work

Political economy and structural social work theories provide valuable insights into the outward migration of rural youth from Nova Scotia and what can be done to better support rural young people and their communities. In this discussion I will use the political economy perspective of Macpherson to illustrate the dominant discourse in our society and thereby explain some of the reasons why rural youth are migrating. I will then use structural social work theory to illustrate first how the dominant ideology permeates rural society and the effects this has based on the information gathered in this study. Using structural social work theory in this way will allow for a discussion of what can be

done to support those who are affected by outward migration using specific examples of suggestions given by the participants in this study.

6.3.1 Macpherson's political economy and rural migration

We live in a liberal democracy. According to Macpherson (1965) liberal democracies are characterized not only by their democratic nature but also by capitalism as an economic system. Ideologically speaking, the goal of an individual living in a capitalist society is to accumulate wealth. A small number of people own the means of production through their wealth and these individuals have a strong hold on the power within our society because of it (Macpherson, 1965; Mullaly, 1997). In classical economic theory those who do not own the means of production, can choose where and to whom to sell their labour in order to earn the wages needed to survive (Macpherson, 1965). Macpherson (1965) however argues that, due to the necessity for us to sell our labour, our free choice is limited by the available opportunities to work in the market. In a neoliberal era such as we live in today, where wealth is most valuable, a person's freedom, self-worth and value in the community are diminished if her/his ability (i.e., access) to labour is taken away or is not present.

The current situation in rural Nova Scotia can be easily understood through this analysis. Young people in rural communities must sell their labour, unless they have the resources to own the means of production. Therefore, unless a young person come from a families that own a profitable company, farm, or possess some other opportunity to accumulate the wealth necessary either to own the means of production or to invest in it, they must sell their labour to someone who does. Based on this, youth must make choices on how to best acquire skills that will be valuable to an employer. When this choice is

made many young people also take into account their personal aptitudes and passions in order to choose a career that will also be valuable to them personally as well as economically. These skills and abilities may be those that young people have after high school, but like the participants in this study, many people chose to further these skills through post-secondary education.

Regardless of the path that a young person takes to get these skills, their ability to use them to gain a wage is dependent on the jobs available to them in their area. In rural Nova Scotia there is currently a shortage of positions in almost every sector as evidenced by the high unemployment rate (Government of Nova Scotia, 2013) and the decline of traditional industry. Another issue that must be considered when individuals are looking to sell their labour is the availability of work that provides a living wage. With a low minimum wage and the prevalence of contract and part-time positions, this is difficult in rural areas. When these factors are considered, it is plain to see why young people are leaving rural Nova Scotia: regardless of an individual's residential preference, their freedom to choose where to sell their labour is hampered by the opportunities available to use their skills in a specific area. Therefore, migrating away from rural Nova Scotia become less of a choice and more of an imperative.

As stated throughout this study, the culture of Nova Scotia is one that understands leaving because migration is something that has been happening in different ways for a long time; whether it was traveling abroad as a sailor in the 1800s, participating in manufacturing in Ontario in the 1970s, or working on oil rigs in the present day, the

history and folklore of Nova Scotia documents migration in various forms. The analysis above is used by many of the participants in this study. As one participant stated:

“There are jobs out West. If I can’t get ahead here, then what choice do I have but to go? I guess it doesn’t make sense not to” (Leaver, male)

I believe that this analysis is one that many Nova Scotians understand, although they would not describe in the terms that I have used. The bare bones of Macpherson’s work states that those who do not have the wealth to own the means of production (the plant, the farm, the company) must work for a wage to not only survive, but to hold a valuable position in society. If you are unable to do this, then the choice becomes whether you can settle for less in your home town, or move to where you can receive more for your efforts. Recognizing that this line of thinking is taken as common sense in a liberal capitalist society is important to understanding, what is perhaps the most obvious reason people migrate out of rural Nova Scotia. Indeed, in this study participants cited employment as the key reason why they migrate or would consider migration away from their rural community. What makes these ideas appear as “common sense”, is that they are so rooted in the common discourse of society that they are taken for granted as truth.

6.3.2 Structural social work

Structural social work theory explains the ways in which the values of liberalism permeate society by way of social institutions and social relations. Here, structural social work becomes valuable because it not only explains how ideas become part of the foundation of a society, but also because it outlines the points at which these ideas can be challenged and changed.

Liberal ideals form what Mullaly (1997) calls the foundation of society. Macpherson's work allows us to understand how liberalism creates a situation where the outward migration of youth from rural communities becomes common place. Yet in order to fully understand rural outward migration, we must understand how these ideas dominate society so completely that they are taken as "common sense", such as I described above. A good example from this study is the way that participants describe the role of the education system and guidance counsellors in their plans for after high school. Education institutions play a significant role in rural communities, as evidenced by the changing methodology of this study. Guidance counsellors may represent the official stance of the school system when it comes to what is best for students after graduation and what factors should be considered when making life choices. Many participants described their interactions with the local guidance counsellor as being frustrating because they felt the advice they were getting was generic and dismissive of their own career and life aspirations. Many were encouraged to attend local, well known institutions, and post-secondary training was encouraged. Participants also reported that these interactions focused on what they were going to "do" in terms of careers, while issues about the difficulties of transitioning from high school into the world or what participants desired in terms of residential preference were not topics of guidance discussion. It was stated many times by participants that what was most important when they were making plans post-high school plans was what they were going to do next in order to reach career goals. Their residential preferences and anxieties about leaving (or staying in) the Valley were not officially addressed.

In this example we see how issues that are seen as important to a liberal society, such as foraging a profitable career, are placed in high importance by those who represent the institution. Events such as career day and post-secondary day that are held by the school further the message that career is most important, while discussions around what a student wants in terms of lifestyle and community, as well as anxieties about transitioning into adulthood are left untouched. In this study, it was found that this lack of support outside of what was possible in terms of wage labour was discouraging and many participants wanted more emphasis to be placed on these issues as evidenced by their need to be told to “do what makes you happy”.

Not only was it reported that guidance counsellors and the school system in general placed the greatest emphasis on what young people were going to do as a career, but it was also found that youth experienced this in their interactions with other adults as well.

“I don’t remember any [adults] asking anything other than where I was going to school or what I wanted to do [as a job]” (Leaver, female)

As Mullaly (1997) explains the dominant ideals of a society are passed on through societal institutions, as illustrated by the school system, and also through social relations. The way that adults outside the education system also focus on what young people do after high school in terms of their career and post-secondary studies (instead of other life goals) is one way that it is possible to see the transfer of this dominant ideology through social relations.

6.4 Disrupting the dominant message through mentorship programs

Continuing with the theme of education, all of the participants gave some indication that they felt they would have benefited from some sort of young adult mentorship when they were making migration choices during the final stages of high school. For some participants this meant that they wanted to connect with someone with recent lived experience of leaving. Others wanted more encouragement to make choices that would make them happy and some participants stated that they would have liked more information on what jobs were available in their home town from young adults who have stayed. Mentorship was also a point of discussion for the advisory committee during the formulation of interview questions and also as a point for further action based on the results of this study. It is also important at this point to contextualize these comments and opinions as those that are coming from young adults reflecting on their own high school experiences, not those of youth who are currently in high school. While having young adult participants allows for the benefit of hindsight and reflection, having the ideas of those youth who are presently facing these choices would allow for a more realistic representation of what is currently taking place for youth in high school. Any suggestions that are presented here come with the expectation that, to move forward, consultation with youth currently in high school would need to take place.

From a structural social work perspective, taking some action on this point could be a good way to begin to disrupt or change the way that education institutions reproduce the dominant message of capitalism. As described above, by focusing on careers and post-secondary education, guidance services in school reproduce the message that gaining the most wealth possible should be the most important consideration that youth make when making plans for after high school. This advice reinforces the expectation that the only way for an individual to live a fulfilling life is to fit into the dominant, capitalist system. By offering advice that considers other issues such as residential preferences from lived experience instead of from an “expert”, the dominant message is presented alongside an alternative dialogue.

The following statement by one leaver aptly describes what many participants were looking for in terms of advice when they were finishing high school:

“I would like someone who really knew what they were talking about and could speak to me in a way that didn’t feel patronizing and was someone who I felt could understand where I was coming from and could get in my head and I knew could understand what I wanted out of life” (Leaver, male)

Most participants stated that the most obvious way to support youth in getting this kind of guidance would be to connect them in some way with young adults in their early to mid-twenties who had lived experience on the path that youth are planning to take. In consultation with the advisory committee and based on statements from participants, I have chosen to present two programs that could be used as starting points to begin a discussion on alternative ways to offer guidance to rural youth.

6.4.1 4-H

As participants began to tell me about their frustrations with the guidance they received when they were making choices about their plans after high school I began to reflect on my experience with the 4-H program, its rural roots, and the cyclical nature of its structure. I believe that it is important to consider the 4-H program in this discussion because of the organization's history as a youth program developed in rural communities. As stated before in this paper, as well as in other literature (Beyond Free Fall, 2008; Pugh, 2003), many social programs are developed in isolation from rural communities which impacts the implementation and overall usefulness of the programming for rural dwellers. 4-H can not only be seen as a grassroots rural program for youth, but as a proven benefit in terms of life skills and rural youth leadership (Fox et al., 2003; Lerner et al., 2005).

4-H is one of the largest youth organizations in the world, seven million youth are involved in fifty countries (National 4-H Council, 2013). In Canada, 4-H is celebrating 100 years of activity in rural Canada, and also some more urban areas as well (4-H Canada, 2013). The basic structure of the 4-H program is that young people from eight to twenty-one years of age complete projects in various fields (from gardening and cattle showmanship to sewing and computer programming) with the help of adult volunteers ("leaders") who are knowledgeable in that field. There are various levels of competition that the projects are entered into from the local level up and up to national competition in many of the project classes. Along with the individual projects, youth are responsible for the day to day running of the club with the support of leaders, judging and public speaking components, as well as community work.

Ideally, once a young person has aged out of the 4-H program they would return as leaders. In this way individuals over twenty-one years of age can “give back” the skills that they acquired through 4-H and also the skills that they have developed through other activities such as school, work, and other hobbies. In many ways, the structure of the 4-H program provides solutions for many of the frustrations that participants of this study described: guidance through life experience, knowledge specific to careers and locals, and opportunities to speak with young adults who are not too far removed from the high school experience. I would also add, that the 4-H program offers opportunities for youth to build relationships with young adults and other potential adult allies in a way that is sustained and more personal than a relationship that could be built with a guidance counsellors or another adult on career day.

While 4-H offers a youth program specific to the rural context and many other benefits, the very nature of this study shows that such a program is in jeopardy because of the outward migration of rural youth from Nova Scotia. One of the key barriers to creating a situation where rural youth can connect with young adults is the lack of young adults in the area with a wide range of migration, career, and other life experience. One participant expressed this concern after describing the need to connect rural high school students with young adults with varying life experience:

“I feel almost hypocritical suggesting that, like “oh someone needs to be there and talk to [youth] and be a rock, or embrace the community and try and help out”. But here I am sitting [out West] and not doing that”
(Leaver, male)

The Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry report *Beyond Freefall* (2008) also raised concerns about the impact that outward migration from rural

areas in Canada had on volunteerism and poverty, particularly the impact of not having young adults who are able to volunteer in communities where the population is aging rapidly.

Throughout this process it has been clear to myself and the advisory committee that, while existing community programs like 4-H offer a wealth of knowledge and lessons learned in terms of supporting youth, a process of reimagining rural youth mentorship programs is needed. The next section of this chapter explores one example of an initiative that could be adapted to the changing rural context.

6.4.2 Human library

I first encountered the idea of the “human library” through the Ottawa Public Library when I moved to Ottawa in 2011. On their website, The Human Library Organization (2013) explains that the human library started in Denmark in 2000 as part of a movement in Copenhagen to end violence and promote multiculturalism and diversity.

The website states:

“The Human Library enables groups to break stereotypes by challenging the most common prejudices in a positive and humorous manner. It is a concrete, easily transferable and affordable way of promoting tolerance and understanding” (*What is the human library?* The Human Library Organization, 2013)

The idea is that individuals with varying life experiences and identities volunteer to be “books” which can be “signed out” for a short period of time (twenty minutes for example) by individuals or small groups (The Human Library Organization, 2013; Ottawa Public Library, 2013). “Books” would then answer questions and share their life experiences with those that access them in informal conversations while operating under

guidelines that promote respect for all those involved (Ottawa Public Library, 2013). In 2012, the Ottawa Public Library (2013) welcomed “books” from many walks of life including bus drivers, radio broadcasters, sex workers, and Aboriginal spiritual healers.

Although I did not attend the event, I was intrigued by the idea and I found myself reflecting on it when transcribing the following quote:

“[We could have] some kind of outreach where you could just email someone and ask what they did and why they did it. It might be just enough to give people better plans about [going out West]” (Leaver, male)

Other participants mentioned that it may be useful to contact young adults about their experiences using email, Google Hangouts and Skype as well as social media such as Facebook and Twitter. What was most inspiring about participant comments was that many of them were willing and excited to speak to high school students about their personal migration and other choices, however they felt unable to because of their distance from the community, or they were unsure how to reach youth in the community.

What is most appealing about the human library is the potential that this method has to allow youth to connect in a focused way with people that they may not otherwise have a chance to. By adapting this method to bring individuals who have experience as stayers, leavers, and returners with different education and career backgrounds could enable students to have conversations that would be difficult otherwise. Students could “sign out” those “books” who they feel could offer them information that was most relevant to the choices they are making.

Many participants warned against assembly style interactions where young people are inactively attending sessions where adults set the agenda. The human library model differs from these traditional panels or lecture style information sessions for a few

reasons. First, it moves away from a model where youth are “talked at” to one where youth can direct the conversation individually or in small groups. This collaborative style would turn the interaction into more of a conversation, instead of a situation where an expert is deciding what information youth need. Second, youth are able to choose which “books” are most useful to them, instead of having teachers or other adults try to meet the needs of all in one large gathering. Again, it takes away the adult idea of what is best for youth and allows for an interaction where youth seek information based on the reality of the choices they are making. This is important based on the information offered by participants who described their interactions with guidance counsellors as being generic and out of tune with their needs. Third, this model may offer youth a way to more comfortably ask questions that they might feel uncomfortable asking in a larger group.

A human library event would also allow for the use of technology such as Skype to connect young adults who are living in other areas to rural youth. This type of technology is readily available in any rural setting where there is an internet connection at very low cost; most schools with internet access have computers or laptops that would allow an individual or small group to see and speak to “books” living all over the world. This could be especially helpful for youth who are thinking about going out West, traveling with different youth programs, or who are thinking about attending specific post-secondary programs in other parts of the country or the world. The “books” could also change year to year based on the interest of the student cohort.

Again, these ideas were formulated without the consultation of youth who would currently benefit from these programs. Therefore the usefulness of a program such as this one would have to be discussed with youth. Based on the information gathered from the

participants of this study, and based on my own experience as a rural high school student, it seems as though an event like the human library would be best held during the school day using the facilities that are available there. Although a community event may be valuable, issues such as transportation, infrastructure, and poverty may make it difficult for an event such as this to be accessible to everyone.

The human library is just one possible way to reconsider the way that rural youth get information to inform the choices they are making about the next phase of their lives. What I believe is most important is that any initiative which takes place is done so based on direct leadership from youth with varying life experiences, values, and aspirations for the future.

A rural youth mentorship program as described here may be seen as a Band-Aid solution for the structural issues that have led to a situation where young people must leave rural areas. However, structural social work practice insists that immediate issues are addressed alongside bigger systemic issues (Moreau, 1990). A rural youth mentorship program that considers an individual as more than just a labourer by giving them advice on issues outside of work and subverses the dominant discourse while offering youth what they need in the moment. According to the participants of this study, what is most needed at the point of finishing high school is advice and support.

6.5 Growing up rural versus just growing up: The usefulness of structural social work's dialectical approach in rural social work with youth

Throughout the interviews and advisory committee discussion the question arose of whether or not certain experiences or issues were specific to rural youth or if they are symptoms that many young people experience as they transition into adulthood. For

example, some participants stated that they were apprehensive about moving away to university after high school, or that as young adults they were concerned about finding work in their field of study. These feelings could easily be those that are held by people growing up in rural as well as urban areas. Yet, there seemed to be unique ways that rural youth experience these issues as they are confronted with the imperative of migration and experiencing culture shock as they transition to an urban environment.

The dialectical approach of structural social work has been helpful in understanding the ways that rural contexts change, mitigate or create extra challenges for young people who are experiencing what may be seen as the regular growing pains of transitioning into adulthood. Borrowing from the modernist perspective that there are universal social problems that are experienced by individuals (Mullaly, 1997) allows us to accept that migration for anyone may be difficult, especially when it marks a new stage of life such as going off to post-secondary education or working full time for the first time in one's life. The post-modernist perspective allows us to understand how individual experiences and geographic locations change the ways that migration is experienced and perceived by individuals and groups (Mullaly, 1997).

As stated by Mullaly (1997) "without a dialectical analysis, the temptation would be to opt for either modernism or post-modernism as a perspective on which to base one's critical theory. This would, of course, result in the potential contributions of one or the other being omitted, which in turn would render a disservice to those suffering exploitation and subordination" (p.128). Without using a dialectical analysis when trying to understand issues faced by rural youth, we run the risk of only seeing these issues in one of two ways: as issues that affect youth or as a problem that is completely unique to

an individual or group. By using a dialectic approach we can understand that, not only migration, but substance use, violence, racism etc., are experienced by many youth regardless of location. However, the specific location (be it geographic, economic, or social) impacts on how this problem manifests for the individual or group. Rural social work scholars, Pugh and Cheers (2010) as well as Collier (2006) state the importance that this understanding has on rural work. I believe that this study further emphasizes this importance.

6.6 Returners as failures

Throughout this study many participants described ways that people who return to their small, rural community are seen as “failures”. This idea is also found in other literature on rural youth migration (Looker, 2001; Malatest & Associates, 2002). Yet, this theme is not discussed in much detail, nor is it clear how this theme impacts communities and young people in rural areas. Although it is difficult to fully understand such a perception from such a small sample size, there are insights and points of discussion to be gained from the information gathered in this study.

It is important to note that the connection between returning and “failing” was described from two different points. First, as a perception that participants felt the community or groups within the community hold, possibly from lived experience or through stereotypes. The second way this was described was by some participants who have left and felt that returning would somehow be failing, giving in or giving up on the hard work they have put into getting away. For example, one participant stated:

“Just something tells me that I worked so hard to get out of [the Valley] that coming back to it is almost like I’m not trying hard enough or something. I don’t know if that makes sense or not. It’s more of a gut

feeling. I know it sounds really negative, but I dunno. It's almost depressing to get all the way out here and then come back to it, if that makes any sense." (Leaver, male)

In this way, equating returning and failing is a judgment that is cast both externally (on to others) and internally (on to one's self).

This study and other research has shown that this theme arises in rural communities in Nova Scotia and across Canada (Looker, 2001; Malatest & Associates, 2002). However, there is little information available on how to understand the assumptions, realities, and meanings behind this stereotype. Macpherson's (1965) theories may offer one way of understanding this theme. In our liberal society wealth is highly valued. As stated by one advisory committee member, "People must think that when you return you are giving up so much money and opportunity. So that just seems stupid". It could be that, in a community where there is little economic opportunity, people who return are seen as giving up something valuable to come home.

Adding to this, participants in this study described ways that urban life seems to be seen as more valuable or exciting, while rural areas are seen as having less culture, opportunities and even as being stagnant. The idea that rural life is not as desirable as urban life may also be evidenced by the "escape" theme that was presented by participants. This need to leave the Valley was described as something more than just wanting to leave the Valley to experience new things in the world, but an individual realization that in order to "be someone" you had to leave the Valley.

"Somehow growing up in the Valley would create an attitude in people where they would just sort of stagnate and become stale and never reach for anything more. I felt like, were I to stay here, then that sort of thing would happen to me. And that was terrifying." (Leaver, male)

Although many participants described the theme of returners as failures, many participants also described a sentiment among adults in the community where young people who left were seen in a negative light; as being “too good” for the Valley or as “traitors”. In light of the above discussion, it is difficult to understand how these two seemingly opposite views can be held. It may be important at this point to reflect on rural social work literature that describes the importance that solidarity and extended family networks play in rural communities (Collier, date; Pugh and Cheers, date).

Canadian social work academic Ken Collier (2006) has stated that what sets rural social work apart is the way that rural and indigenous people organize their society. If we consider a spectrum where hunting and gathering societies are on the left, modern capitalism on the right and family farming to the right of centre, we can begin to visualize Collier’s model. Canadian communities can be placed at different points along this spectrum, but the interest of the state is to move them as efficiently as possible into the capitalist designation (Collier, 2006). Collier (2006) mostly described the family farm model of agriculture, where food is grown or raised to feed the family, and then surplus is either stored or sold. If we consider this model, then perhaps stayers and returners are valued because of the function they have in upholding this traditional lifestyle in light of increased capitalist pressure to move potential labourers into a more accessible location in relation to the market; in other words, into cities.

Participants of this study also shed some light onto this issue. Some participants explained that older members of the community may not understand why young people leave because it was not something that older rural people a) had the opportunity to do and b) it was never as integral to their economic survival to do so. Using the dialectical

approach of structural social work allows for the possibility that within the same community there could be both the idea that returners are failures and the idea that young people who stay are worthy. Additionally, both beliefs could be present in the same individual (Mullaly, 1997)

While more study is obviously needed to fully understand why returners are seen as failures, the exploration of the link between political economic theories, the impression that rural living is sub-par compared to urban life, and the “escape” theme provides a compelling base for further investigation.

This idea of returners as failures is something that should be seriously considered when thinking about practices and policies to support young people returning to Nova Scotia. I can identify two ways that this could impact young adults who may be considering migrating back to Nova Scotia. The first consideration that should be made is the frustration that young adults might experience when returning to a community that looks upon them as a failure. Although this idea is based solely on my own experience and the experience of some of the participants of this study, it may be possible that the thought of returning to a community that views young returners as sub-par compared to people who stay away would make people feel uncomfortable. In a small community your status as a returner would be known to many, making your stereotypical status as a failure visible as well.

A second way that seeing returners as failures that needs to be considered in making policy to address outward migration is the way that this may affect the social narrative of the community. If the rural community sees itself as a retreat for those who could not make it in the “real world” then what does that mean for community pride and

for the value that is placed for the people who live there? At a more macro level, if rural communities view themselves as second-rate this may impact the ability of communities to advocate for themselves on the provincial or federal stage. If rural communities view themselves and their members as substandard and less valuable in comparison with urban areas, then it may be difficult to approach policy in a strength based way that values rural communities and what they have to offer to the province as a whole.

6.7 Going to Alberta

In the final section of this chapter I would like to reflect on the information gathered specifically about migration to Alberta. Three of the participants had experience either living in Alberta or having a partner working there for long periods of time. It is safe to say that every participant in this study has either struggled with their own choice of whether or not to migrate to Alberta or has been affected by someone they care about migrating to Alberta. In a study on labour force in Atlantic Canada, the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council stated that the number one destination for migrants away from Nova Scotia is Alberta (Chaundy, 2012). This high level of migration is due in large part to the economic boom in that province because of the oil and gas industry (Chaundy, 2012).

Many interesting pieces of information were gathered in this study about various issues surrounding migration to Alberta. Although more focused study is needed to understand these issues, I would like to point out a few topics that the findings of this study bring to light.

The first topic, and perhaps most interesting, is the moral implications that working in or moving to Alberta holds. Participants in this study described this morality

in two ways. First, the way that some participants felt negative judgment coming from others as a result of their own work in Alberta. Second, the way participants themselves cast negative judgment onto others.

Participants who had worked in Alberta felt as though they were judged in two ways. The first was because working in Alberta is either directly or indirectly linked with supporting the oil industry. Many Nova Scotians travel to Alberta to work directly on oil rigs or to do other labour that supports the industry. Because of the environment and social implications, especially in connection with the tar sands and fracking practices, work in this industry is sometimes viewed with a lens that sees this practice as morally wrong. Participants described others referring to their “dirty oil money” and often felt as though others looked at their work with disdain. This was also met with what may be ambivalence from the participants themselves who felt keenly aware of the implications of their work in the oil industry. These participants also felt that, if they were not working in Alberta, then they would not be able to financially support themselves or their families. Many described a “damned if you do and damned if you don’t” kind of situation.

During the course of this study other participants described how they felt that going to Alberta and working in the oil industry was undesirable, both because of the environmental damages that the processes of oil extraction and refinement cause, but also because they feel that participating in the industry changes people. For example, one participant felt that many of the friends that she knew who went to Alberta have become “money grubbing” and their values have shifted to those that reflect capitalist ideals more

so than before they left Nova Scotia. Some participants also expressed concern that people who go to Alberta pick up “undesirable” things such as drug addictions.

The second topic is the dynamics that are created in families and communities when one member of a nuclear, heterosexual family²², presumably most often the male partner, works in Alberta on contract (for a matter of months or weeks) while the rest of the family remains in Nova Scotia. This type of arrangement means for some women that they operate as a single parent for most of the year. While this arrangement is not new for Nova Scotian families as short-term migration for work has been taking place in the province for a long time, it is important to consider the impact that this type of work could have for families and the community. Absences such as this undoubtedly are troublesome for both those who are leaving and for those who are left behind. At the very least we must consider the ways that family members miss their loved ones, but in a more extreme way the implications for women who function as single parents and the ways that communities can support them should be examined.

The example of split migrant families is yet another example of how gaining wealth is valued above all else in a capitalist society. Individuals are encouraged to seek out labour where ever it is available, even if that means fracturing the nuclear family and community. This is one situation where the lack of choice as described by Macpherson (1965) becomes extremely clear as evidenced by the conversation below between myself and a participant whose husband works out West:

“If he could make the same money here, would [your husband] come home [to the Valley]?”

“Absolutely. Of course” (Returner, female)

In this situation the only reason why one partner has left is to make ends meet for the family financially. She continues:

“It’s so hard. We want to get things paid off, but we want him here. It’s just kind of a balancing act: weighing what is going to be better in the future. I think, oh it would be so nice to have home. But then I would have to get a high paying job, with experience I don’t have in a place where there are no jobs to begin with. We would both have to work and someone would have to take care of the baby... We are better off than we would be if we were all together. Financially anyway.” (Returner, female)

It is clear that this family, and the many other families in Nova Scotia who live this lifestyle, do so not out of freedom of choice, but because of the constraints put on them by their economic situation.

Finally, I think it is interesting to note the solidarity that some participants described between themselves and other Nova Scotians or Maritimers who work in Alberta. For one participant, the choice to move to Alberta was based on the extensive network of friends that already lived there. For another, a large number of individuals from their post-secondary program ended up living in the same city. All participants who had lived in Alberta reported that there was a large community of Nova Scotians out West who made themselves known to each other through events, Maritime themed watering holes, and as the primary identity that they use to introduce themselves in new situations. One participant explained that, for many Maritimers working in Alberta, their identity as such becomes very important to them and is sometimes even highly valued by employers. This participant also explained that having others around him who made the same choice as he did (to leave Nova Scotia) makes it easier for him to come to terms with the choice because he is “not the only one”. Having this shared community also made it easier to

talk to others about why he left and the mixed emotions he experiences because of his migration.

6.8 Conclusion

The data gathered in this study offer many points for discussion and reflection. It is easy to see based on this chapter that structural social work and political economy theory offers useful tools in understanding the outward migration of youth, especially how the dialectical approach in structural social work allows for a deeper understanding of issues that may seem dichotomous.

Participants and advisory committee members offer many ideas for change that could impact the wellbeing of stayers, leavers, and returners and the overall community in the Valley. The advisory committee and I feel strongly that any action taken from here should be done in partnership with youth in the area in order to more fully understand their needs and perspectives.

7. Chapter Seven: Conclusion

“Farewell to Nova Scotia, the sea bound coast.

Let your mountains dark and dreary be.

For when I am far away on the briny ocean toss,

Will you ever heave a sigh or a wish for me?”

Farewell to Nova Scotia, Author unknown.

In this final chapter, I will review the findings of this study in light of the research questions posed within the introduction. I will also address areas for future study on the topic of rural youth and rural outward migration based on this research and the gaps present in this field as a whole.

7.1 The research questions

In the introductory chapter of this thesis I state one primary research question for this study: *What factors do rural youth consider when making the choice to stay in or leave their rural community once finished high school?* This research found that education and employment were the primary reasons that young people decided to leave the Valley after high school, which reflects the findings of other research (Hektner, 1995; Dupuy et al, 2000; Looker, 2001; Malatest & Associates, 2002). By using a political economy analysis of these findings it was possible to gain a deeper understanding of their meaning. Macpherson (1965) explains that, for those who do not own the means of production, their freedom is limited by his or her ability to sell their labour. If an

individual cannot use their skills and abilities²³ to labour in their current community then they must migrate to an area where they can. Participants stating that employment and education are the most important factors in their choices to migrate is significant because it gives evidence to Macpherson's theories. In other words, the participants of this study are leaving the Valley in order to gain skills and abilities, as well as to find employment where they can use them. As stated within this thesis, in these circumstances migration becomes less of a choice and more of an imperative.

This study also found that many of the young people who wanted to leave the Valley after high school did so because they felt a need to either "escape" the Valley or "explore" the world outside of the Valley. This was also paired with a feeling of "just knowing" from an early age that they were destined to leave.

The participants who stayed in the Valley right after high school stated that they did so for a variety of reasons, mostly to remain close to family. However, not feeling ready to leave and a love for the area were other reasons that some participants chose to stay.

It was found that choices about migration were still happening for all of the participants, regardless of whether they lived in the Valley or away. Many participants expected this to be an ongoing issue for them as they age. Many participants told me that their migration choices at the end of high school did not create a lot of stress for them,

²³ One of the key ways that individuals gain skills and abilities is through education. Education would therefore play a significant role in an individual's options within the market. Also, the high cost of post-secondary education may motivate individuals to seek out higher paying jobs in order to get a full return on tuition costs.

unlike the findings by Hektner (1995) and Kirkpatrick et al. (2005). However, these choices are emotional ones for participants now that they are in their twenties.

Along with the primary research question, I set out to find the answers to three sub questions. The first being: *What role do high school guidance counsellors and adult allies play in supporting youth to make decisions about migration?* All of the participants of this study stated that their interactions with guidance counselors in high school did not give them the information they needed. Many felt as though the conversations they had with guidance counselors were generic and did not fit their personal aptitudes and aspirations.

Participants also felt as though they were lacking good advice from a place of experience; for example, from young adults who had lived experience on the paths that participants were considering taking. This was especially true for youth who were planning on leaving the Valley who told me that they knew few adults who had experience leaving. In accordance with the findings of Kirkpatrick et al. (2005) and Ley et al. (1996), the expectations of adults did have an impact on the choices that participants made when they were finishing high school. For some participants, these expectations and the varied advice that they received added stress to the decision making process. Many participants reported that they still seek advice from older adults about migration. However most participants felt as though older adults do not fully understand the realities young adults face in terms of jobs, education, and other factors that young adults consider when migrating.

The second sub question for this research was: *How do stayers, leavers, and returners view their choices about migration after being out of high school for an*

extended period of time? Unlike the other studies reviewed for this thesis, the current study asked participants to reflect on their migration choices at several different points in time. This allowed for an understanding of how participants experienced migration in the moment, but also how they viewed their choices in hindsight. All of the participants stated that they would not change their migration choices. Nevertheless, many wished they had received advice that would have enabled them to be better prepared for the road they took.

Participants also stated that they did not fully understand the ramifications of their choices when they finished high school. Only one person felt that she understood how leaving would affect her relationship with her family and how she might experience “culture shock” if she were to leave her small community. All others felt that they were not thinking about the long-term effects of their choice to stay or leave, they were simply focused on the present at the time.

The final sub question was: *What are the implications of the above questions for social work with rural young people and their communities?* This study offered some interesting lessons for social work, both for theory and practice. In terms of theory, the analysis given using structural social work theory, in particular the dialectical approach of structural social work, demonstrates the usefulness of this framework in understanding rural issues and rural social work practice. In light of the connections made between the work of rural social work academics like Pugh and Cheers (2010) and Collier (2006) and structural social work theory, I think that the usefulness of a structural social work analysis of rural issues in general has been demonstrated in this work. One specific example of this was found with respect to the education system. Participants stated that

the formal education system that they participated in during high school did not offer them the information that was truly relevant to their needs at the time. The information instead focused on how young people can be most successful in the labour market, which plays into the dominant neo-liberal discourse of our society. By using structural social work theory to understand this problem and then devise solutions that target different levels of society it would be possible to address the immediate concerns of participants while working towards society's transformation. One example of such action was given in Chapter Six.

The dialectical approach to structural social work allows practitioners to understand issues that impact rural youth as both arising as a result of various oppressions that can be felt throughout society and also as being experienced uniquely by local youth due to geographic location, cultural differences and a host of other factors unique to their community. For this study, the dialectical approach has been helpful in understanding how some of the responses given by participants can be seen as universal growing pains for many youth, but experienced in unique ways because they were rural.

In terms of rural social work practice, the methodology used in this study serves as a reminder of the importance of working with rural communities when conducting research. The literature on the topic was explored in Chapter four (Ginsberg, 2011; Pugh and Cheers, 2010; Cohen, 1982) and my experience of conducting research as a community member reaffirmed the ways that knowing and being trusted by the community and the participants of the study strengthen the research process. I believe that I was able to deepen the interviews and understand the context of the participants in a

way that would not be possible if I was an outsider, or if I had not grown up with many of the participants.

Participatory action research was chosen as the methodology for this project because, by nature, it respects the need for rural communities to be aware of what is happening in their communities and to have the opportunity to play a role in activities that affect them (Cohen, 1982). Another way that this study shines a light on the use of P.A.R. in social work research is the way that it views the researcher and advisory committee as participants. This study empowered me as a researcher because I was able to study a phenomenon that affects my life and I was able to do this with an advisory committee made up of people who are experiencing very similar issues- i.e. migration. Not only does this make for interesting and vibrant research, it allows for the dismantling of the idea of the “expert” in social work and in research.

Social work is a dynamic and diverse profession. As policy makers, community workers and counselors its presence in different roles allows the profession to consider the ramifications of outward migration of rural youth at different levels of society and to use the information presented in this study in different ways. For example, social workers who do one on one counselling or group work can use this information to connect the personal experiences of their clients to the political and economic trends influence outward migration. Social workers who do community work may use this information to help their community secure funding for job creation or to support communities to engage in advocacy for their unique needs. Finally, social workers who write and critique social policies can use the information of this study as a spring board for further research

or the construction of policy that more adequately addresses the needs of young Nova Scotians.

Because the literature on this topic is limited, I believe it would be useful to circulate the data and findings from this study through the social work profession, ideally through the Canadian Association of Social Workers. This is because of the information presented on migration, but also because this study adds to the limited literature on rural. It is important that rural social work and its associated issues gain increased attention in by Canadian social work profession and it's educators.

I believe that this overview would benefit from the consideration of one final question which is posed in Farewell to Nova Scotia: "*For when I am far away on the briny ocean toss, will you ever heave a sigh or a wish for me?*" This question could be interpreted in different ways, but in the context of this study I feel this question could be asking if the government of Nova Scotia or various communities are concerned that their youth are leaving. When asked if the community should be concerned about outward migration, the answers were varied between participants and ranged from the community should not be concerned at all, to the community should be very concerned. However, when asked if they felt that the Nova Scotia government was supportive of youth, participants answered that there was very little evidence to show that the government was concerned about their interests or that the government was really committed to supporting young adults who want to stay in or return to the Valley. Participants explained that measures that have been put in place by the government to address issues like outward migration did not impact them or have an effect on their migration decisions.

This research project was able to answer these questions and, with the use of P.A.R. methodology, I believe the interviews offered a well-rounded picture of each participant's individual experience. These individual experiences came together in order to create a picture of what migration means for one community, at least from the perspective of young adults who grew up there. This study also brought to light other questions that need to be answered in order to fully understand the outward migration of rural youth. These questions will be addressed in the following section.

7.2 Areas for future study

The outward migration of rural youth is an issue that has received little attention in Canada. Although there was significant attention paid to rural youth issues in the early 2000s, as evidenced in particular by the three Canadian studies featured in this thesis, the study of rural youth migration in Canada has received little study since.

Due to the small sample size of this study and because of the nature of a Masters of Social Work thesis, this study was unable to fully tackle this complex and multifaceted issue. It is important to consider a few areas of study that should be continued in order to gain more information on the issues that young people are facing in Nova Scotia.

The way that people of different genders experience migration and the choices around migration is one area that this study does not fully explore. Although other studies scratch the surface of this, as described in the literature review, this is one issue that deserves further attention. Also, because of the small sample size and the lack of diversity within the community itself, this study did not explore the lived experience of people from marginalized groups, such as individuals from the LGBTQ community, people of colour, people living with disabilities and indigenous people. While the participants in

this study came from different class positions, the differences between the ways that people from different classes experience migration were not explicitly discussed. Future study on rural youth migration should focus on how these differences among people impact their migration choices.

The above suggestions for future study reflect some of the shortcomings of this particular study. However, this study also opened doors to new questions for further exploration. The first is the unique experiences of Nova Scotians who migrate to Alberta. The two participants in this study who had experience living in Alberta offered some interesting perspectives on life out West. This included the ways that the Maritime subculture in cities like Edmonton or Calgary helped participants to feel at home and how these participants feel that young people could benefit from some guidance before they go to Alberta.

Another issue that arose within this study was the experiences of families in which one partner works out West while the other stays in the Valley. While this type of migration is not new, it does raise some specific questions for social work. For example, how does this type of migration impact young mothers who are left at home raising children? Or, how does this type of migration affect the mental health of the partner who must be away from their family for long periods of time?

The final theme that from this study that needs further exploration is the “explore/escape” concept that was cited by many participants who left the Valley after high school. This idea was presented by participants when asked why they wanted to leave the Valley. For this study, “explore” meant that an individual wanted to experience the world outside of the Valley, while “escape” meant that an individual wanted to leave

because they did not approve of the lifestyle and attitudes (or perceived lifestyle and attitudes) of those around them. While very different concepts, both of these ideas indicate that these participants thought there was something outside the Valley that they wanted to experience. These concepts were also often paired with participants stating that they “just knew” that they would leave the Valley after high school. More study of these ideas could explore if there are certain types of experiences that lead a person to want to “escape” or “explore” and how or if gender plays a role.

It is my hope that the topic of outward migration of rural youth is one that receives the attention of academics, community research groups and governments. I believe that social work in particular has a place in this discussion because of the impacts that inequalities in society based on race, class, and gender etc. may have on the ability of individuals to make choices that are good for them and their communities.

7.3 Final conclusions

This thesis not only offered an analysis of the outward migration of rural youth, but also offered suggestions for actions that could be taken in order to support rural young people in their choices and to help to make a place for youth in rural communities. This can only be accomplished by giving rural youth and young people the opportunities to share their knowledge and experience. The participants of this study explained the many different factors that play a role in their choices to stay in, leave, or return to the Valley. Yet when finding employment is cited as the primary reasons for leaving, the impact that neoliberal capitalism has on the ability that young people have to choose their

proximity to family, the type of community that they want to live in, and other important factors that contribute to their quality of life cannot be ignored.

In the introduction to this thesis I ask if there is still cause for young Nova Scotians to sing Farewell to Nova Scotia. This study demonstrates that, not only is Farewell to Nova Scotia still relevant, but currently it is an imperative for many rural youth to leave and those who stay must constantly weigh the factors that keep them there with what they could be gaining if they left.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview questions

Section One: Past factors of migration

For this set of questions I am going to ask you to reflect on the choices you made about migration when you were finishing high school or 17/18 years old. It might take some time for you to remember how you felt back then, so please take your time when answering. I am asking you to think back to your feelings, your friends, your work, and where you were living. This might bring up some good and bad memories for you. Please feel free to skip any questions and we can move on, no questions asked. You can just say “pass”. We can also return to these questions later on.

1. Describe your community as you would have when you were finishing high school. Think about the physical description, the people, and the way you felt about being a young person in that particular community.
 - a. *Prompt:* Could you also talk about the opportunities that youth had to find work or take part in recreation?

2. What were your plans for the future at that point? Were you staying in the area? Attending post-secondary education? Working?
 - a. Why did this plan make sense for you at the time?
 - b. Did this plan work out? We will cover this question in more depth later in the interview.

3. In your choice at that time to stay in the Valley or leave, what was the most important factor in your decision?
 - a. Has this changed since then?

4. When you were making plans about the future were you concerned about the long term results of leaving or staying in the Valley? In other words, was this even something that was on your mind?
 - a. *Prompt:* For example, were you concerned with being close to your family? Finding a job that could be done in this area?
 - b. The literature that I have read states that this choice creates a lot of internal conflict or stress for rural youth. Was this true for you?

- i. Did this create any external conflict with family or friends?
5. Where did you see yourself at 30 or 40? Think specifically about the job, lifestyle, and residential preferences (rural, urban or somewhere in between) that you had wanted back then.

Section Two: Current factors of migration

In the next set of questions I am going to ask you to think about the choices you are currently making about migration, your lifestyle and your residential preferences (where you want to live and why). We can come back to any of these questions later in the interview as well. Again, if you want to skip a question, just say “pass”.

1. You spoke a bit about the plans you had for your life when you were leaving high school. Can you tell me about the path you ended up taking in terms of school, work, and where you lived?
2. If you had to make the choice again, would you still stay in (or leave) the Valley?
 - a. What factors would you consider that you didn't think of before?
3. Now, where did you see yourself at 30 and 40? Think specifically about the job, lifestyle, and residential preferences (rural, urban or somewhere in between) that you hope to have.
4. (*This question will be based on where the individual currently lives*)
 - a. If you currently live away from the Valley, do you ever plan on returning?
 - i. If you do, what factors impact your decision?
 - b. If you currently live in the Valley, do you think you will remain here?
 - i. If you do plan on staying, what factors keep you here?
 - ii. If you do plan on staying what situations, if any, would make you consider leaving
 - iii. What has changed that makes you want to leave?
 1. If you plan on leaving, what factors impact your decision?

5. How do these choices affect your relationship with your family?
 - a. Friends?
 - b. Partner?

6. Some people on the advisory committee have stated that they feel a lot of emotions when they think about whether or not to stay in the area. Is this an emotional choice for you?

Section Three: Support in making choices about migration

In the next set of questions I am interested in the advice you got and continue to get from others on your choice of where to live. Some of these questions will ask you to think back to when you were younger, others will focus on the advice and support you get now. I will ask about advice and support. Here, support means how others stand by you and your choices to stay and leave. This is different from advice which could come in the form of tips or statements from others about what they would do in your situation. Feel free to say “pass” if there is anything you don’t want to answer.

1. When you were finishing high school, did you get advice or support from adults in your life when you were making choices about migration?
 - a. Who gave you advice? What kind of advice did they give?
 - i. Was this advice valuable?
 - ii. Did you feel pressure to follow their advice?
 - b. Who gave you support? What kind of support did they give?
 - i. Are these people different than those who gave you advice?
 - ii. Looking back, was this support valuable?

2. Did you talk to a guidance counselor at school about your future plans?
 - a. If yes:
 - i. Why?
 - ii. Were they helpful?
 - iii. What, if anything, would you have changed?
 - b. If no:

- i. Why?
 - ii. Looking back, do you think it would have been helpful?
3. Do you feel like you got enough information when you left high school to make good choices?
 - a. Did you get information from media? What kind?
 - b. Was it more or less helpful than the information you got from other people?
4. If you had to guess, when you were finishing high school, were more of your friends planning on staying or leaving? Did this impact your choice?
 - a. Did you talk to your friends about staying or leaving?
 - b. Did you ask their advice or give any advice on the issue?
5. Do you currently seek advice from older adults (our parent's generation and older) on migration issues?
 - a. Do you feel as though older adults see your concerns in the same way that you do? If there are differences what are they?
6. Is this something that you currently talk about with your friends?
 - a. Is it a different conversation when you talk about this issue with friends from home than with friends from other areas?
7. Are there youth in your life (age 15-20) who talk to you about issues around migration?
 - a. Do they think about staying or leaving in different ways than you do or did when you were their age?
 - b. What advice do you give them? If you don't know any youth, what advice would you give if you were asked?

Section Four: Views on the community

In this section I will be asking questions about how you see the community in the Valley and how you think the community as a whole views young people. I will also be asking some questions about the provincial government. Again, if you feel uncomfortable or do

not want to answer any of these questions, just say “pass” and we will move on. This will be the final section of the interview.

1. Do you feel like there are stereotypes attached to young people who stay in or leave the valley?
 - a. Describe the typical person who leaves the valley?
 - b. Who stays in the valley?
 - c. Who leaves and returns?

2. Do you think that this area is a welcoming place for young people like yourself? Why or why not?

3. Do you think that the migration of young people from the area is one that the community needs to address? Do you think there are enough young people leaving that there should be concern?
 - a. What steps, if any, do you think the community should take to keep young people in the area or entice them to return? Here, community could mean anything from small community groups, municipal government, or townships.

4. At the provincial level, do you think that the government is taking action to support young people? This could be currently or in the past.
 - a. What do you think the provincial government should do to address the issues that young people face in Nova Scotia?
 - b. Recently there has been some attention paid to issues of migration and joblessness by the Nova Scotia government including the “Ships Start Here” and “jobsHere” programs and the creation of the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism. Are you aware of these measures? If yes, do they impact your own plans around migration?
 - c. These measure focus on economic security. Do you think there are issues other than economic ones that policy makers should consider?

That is the end of the questions that I have prepared. Are there any questions you would like to go back to?

Is there anything that you would like to add or talk about before we wrap up?

Appendix B: Young Adult Participant Consent Form



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Dear Participant;

You have been invited take part in this interview today to talk about your experiences of growing up in a rural or small community and your choices to stay in or leave that community. The term I will be using to describe this is “migration”. This simply means moving from the rural community or small town where you grew up to another area. People can migrate out of a small community, migrate in, or return after migrating away for a period of time.

My name is Megan MacBride. I grew up in Canning and went to NKEC for high school. Now, I am a social work student at Carleton University in Ottawa. I am doing this research as part of my Masters of Social Work thesis. I am interested in finding out information about how people make decisions about moving away from or staying in their rural hometown.

I will be talking with young adults (people aged 20-30) who have graduated from NKEC. I have been working with an advisory committee of young people who grew up in this area to come up with the questions I am going to be asking as well as the format I am going to be using.

This consent form is to give you information about the study so you can choose if you would like to be part of it or not.

Do you have to take part?

No. If you don't want to take part you don't have to.

- **You can end the interview at any time, no questions asked.**
- **If there are questions you don't want to answer that is ok too.**

What are we going to do?

I have prepared an interview of about 22 questions that you can look at.

- The interview will take about an hour and a half to two hours.

- I will be recording you with a video camera. The tape will be destroyed once I have written the responses into an electronic document.
- Your name will not be written in the electronic document or the final report.
- My final report will be available for the community, government, and potentially to be published.

What are the risks?

There are a few risks that you should know about before you agree to take part in this study.

- I cannot guarantee that other people will not know that you came to this interview, although I will not be discussing your participation with anyone other than you.
- The topic of leaving home and making choices about the future may be difficult to talk about.
- If you tell me that you are a harm to yourself or someone else I will have to let the appropriate authorities know. This is because I have an ethical obligation to do so as a social worker.
- If you tell me you know of someone under 16 who is being abused or neglected I will also have to let the appropriate person know. This is because I have an ethical obligation to do so as a social worker.
- This is going to take some time out of your day.

What will we do to keep you safe?

I really want to hear what you have to say! Here is what I will do to lessen the risks

- **You can stop the interview at anytime**
- **I will not talk with anyone about the comments you make in this interview, whether or not you took part, or any other information about the study.**
- Your name will not be shown in the report I write.
- I am going to be the only person to view the videotape. Once I have written down the information in electronic form the tape will be destroyed.
- The electronic information will be kept on a password protected USB drive.

- All information will be destroyed by October 2013 or after the final report is written. This includes my copy of this consent form.
- If you decide after the interview that you don't want to be part of the study you have 14 days to contact me, and I will take your information out.
- If you would like to do so, I can send a copy of the transcription to you to read over to ensure that I captured your story accurately.
- Also within the 14 days, if you feel as though you want to change or delete anything from the interview that can be done as well.

Who will use your answers?

I will be the only person to use your comments. No one else will use your information.

This data is being collected for the completion of my MSW thesis. I also will be sharing this research with community members and government. I also hope that this work may be published in a peer reviewed journal as it addresses issues about rural youth that are missing from other research and literature.

What if you have questions later?

I will be in the Valley until July 19. After that you can contact me by email. Here is my contact information:

megan_macbride@carleton.ca, [REDACTED]

You can also contact my supervisor Hugh Shewell at Carleton:

Hugh.shewell@carleton.ca

You can also contact the Research Ethics Board at Carleton University:

**Professor Andy Adler, Chair or Professor Louise Heslop, Vice-Chair
Research Ethics Board, Carleton University Research Office
Carleton University
1125 Colonel By Drive**

Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6

Tel: 613-520-2517 E-mail: ethics@carleton.ca

What happens now?

We are going to go over this form together. I will then answer any questions you may have. I will ask you if you want to take part. If you say “yes” then we will both sign the form and get started.

If you chose not to participate you can grab some snacks and leave when you are comfortable ☺



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Consent (Continued)

Participant _____ **Date** _____.

Researcher _____ **Date** _____.

Consent

Participant _____ **Date** _____.

Researcher _____ **Date** _____.

Appendix C: Research advisory committee brief



Megan MacBride

May 23, 2013

Research Advisory Committee Brief

Project title: Farewell to rural Nova Scotia? A participatory action study of rural youth outward migration in Atlantic Canada

Project timeline:

February	Proposal writing
March	Begin Ethics Review Final proposal draft
April	Proposal defense April 3, 2013 Ethics review Literature review
May	Data collection in Nova Scotia
June	Data collection in Nova Scotia Analysis
July	Analysis
August	Final drafts
September	Thesis defense

Purpose:

- A. To begin a local conversation on the outward migration of youth in our community.
- B. To fulfill the requirements of Megan's MSW thesis.

What is participatory action research (PAR)?

Traditional research often works under the assumption that a researcher is capable of being completely neutral to the topic they are researching, making it impossible for people directly affected by the problem to research and find "truth". PAR research flips this on its head with the idea that the true experience and issues related to a topic can be better understood by those directly involved.

PAR strives to empower the community and the individuals being researched at every point within the research. This involves consulting with key community members on the research question, project design, data collection, and dissemination. This is usually done through the work of an advisory committee.

The "action" piece of PAR is especially important. This means that one of the primary goals of research should be to support a goal of social justice, awareness of an issue with a community, or to further a political or social goal. By involving the community in the PAR process it means that the data gathered can be used by the community, instead of academics from the outside.

There are some limitations to how fully we can use PAR within this project. Because this project was established to complete my MSW thesis, the idea and control of the project does not sit primarily with the community, but with me. Also, I am only in the Valley for a short period of time, which will make it hard for decisions to be made outside of this

group. Finally, because the work needs to follow certain requirements for the MSW program and the Carleton ethics board.

What does the advisory committee do?

The role of the advisory committee is to work with me to help make decisions about the research, who to invite to participate and, to some degree, what should be done with the data once it is collected. Other than that there are very few guidelines that we need to follow in terms of how we work together. I have some ideas on what this group could look like, but I hope that we can create this together.

Tasks to accomplish

These are some tasks and roles that I have put together based on past experiences using PAR and what I have seen so far in my work. This list can be changed, cut down, or extended in ways that we see as working best for us.

Task	Megan's role(s)	Advisory committee's role(s)
Decide on research design	<p>Present options.</p> <p>Construct a final plan based on ethics board approval.</p>	<p>Offer advice, suggestions, and advise on any problems that may arise with each of the possibilities.</p>
Plan future meetings and goals for each meeting	<p>Find a space to meet.</p> <p>Ensure that goals for each meeting are outlined.</p> <p>Offer a plan based on other PAR projects.</p> <p>Keep the committee up to date on the progress of data collection and other tasks related to our meeting</p>	<p>Decide on how much time members are able to give, best dates and locations to meet.</p> <p>Offer input on goals to accomplish at each meeting.</p>

<p>Identify and recruit participants</p>	<p>Be clear on the limits of the amount of people it is possible to speak.</p> <p>Make telephone, email, or in person contact with individuals.</p> <p>Be the contact person on any public calls for participants (posters local paper etc.).</p> <p>Keep the advisory committee up to date on how many participant have agreed to participate.</p> <p>Follow up on the suggestions made by the advisory committee.</p>	<p>Give advice on who would fit into the groups we identify together.</p> <p>Talk to people you may know who would be a good fit.</p>
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<p>Decide on focus group and survey questions</p>	<p>Have prepared a list of sections and sample questions.</p> <p>Facilitate the conversation.</p> <p>Offer opinions based on life experience and what has been seen in the literature.</p> <p>Submit the final questions to the Carleton Ethics Board for clearance (takes 24 hours).</p>	<p>While keeping in mind the broader themes that have been identified in the research and collected by Megan, work together to construct the questions that make the most sense for this community and what we know about life and the people here.</p> <p>(In my experience, this is what takes the longest, but is most valuable.)</p>
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Data collection	<p>Organize the time and place for the focus groups.</p> <p>Lead the focus groups.</p> <p>Record focus groups using video.</p> <p>Transcribe the video recording for each focus group.</p> <p>Import data from any electronic survey.</p>	<p>Members of the advisory committee can individually chose if they want to participate in the focus groups. Their choice will not affect their role on the advisory committee</p> <p>Megan will update you on the progress, but there is no hands on work to be done.</p>
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<p>Data Analysis</p>	<p>Identify themes within the data and themes within sections.</p> <p>Compare the information given by the different groups.</p> <p>Begin to organize the data for the final report.</p> <p>Keep the advisory committee up to date on the information, patterns, and themes within the data.</p> <p>Seek advice on issues that may or may not be significant.</p>	<p>Ideally, we would meet at this stage. However, it may be difficult because of Megan returning to Ottawa (July 6) and the start of summer schedules.</p> <p>Give advice on the patterns and themes that come from the data.</p>
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<p>Report writing</p>	<p>Organize the data within chapters, sections, and issues.</p> <p>Finish literature review and link this information to the data of this study.</p> <p>Ensure that the document meets the standards set out by the Carleton School of Social Work and Post-Doctoral Affairs.</p> <p>Revise the final thesis into versions that can be useful to the community (fact sheets, research briefs, etc) based on the advice from the advisory committee.</p>	<p>Megan may seek advice from the group or individuals on phrasing, obtaining other information to include. But this is a less active period of the process for the advisory committee.</p>
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<p>Disseminate the report</p>	<p>Take part in a MSW thesis defense procedure at Carleton.</p> <p>Be the primary contact for people interested in the study.</p> <p>Organize some sort of community meeting to talk about the report and make it available in different formats.</p> <p>Be available to give public lectures about the study (ideally along with members of the advisory committee)</p> <p>Look into avenues for publication and write an article on the data based on journal guidelines.</p>	<p>The advisory committee will have access to a copy of the thesis report as well as other documents to be circulated in consultation with Megan.</p> <p>Offer advice on a community meeting or gathering to talk about the report and make it available in different formats.</p> <p>Offer advice on the publication of the report.</p>
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