

DERAILED: FACTORS INFLUENCING COLLEGE AND CAREER
DECISIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A
DEINDUSTRIALIZED RURAL COMMUNITY

by

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DEDICATION

To my family, first to my husband and my son, Joseph Scalia III and Joseph Scalia IV, you have inspired me and enriched my life for the past 40 and 32 years, respectively. Nikki Woodward Scalia, my daughter-in-law, to see the remarkable woman you are as you enter your fourth decade gives me joyful hope for the future. Joseph Scaffidi and Florence Michler, my father and mother, and Laurie Naquin, my sister, I have been shaped by your enduring love.

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ABSTRACT

High schools in the United States are charged with preparing students for citizenship and the knowledge, skills and experiences for success in postsecondary education and work. This study examines the problem of how to prepare students for college and work in a rural deindustrialized working-class community where jobs and careers that allow for upward economic mobility are scarce.

This ethnographic case study sought to understand the influences and interplay of school-based and non-school-based factors that influenced students' decisions as they graduated and made the transition to college and work. Participants were two generational groups of alumni from working class families in the same high school. The first group was comprised of those who graduated in the decade that followed the closure of the railroad in Livingston, Montana in 1985. The second group was comprised of those who graduated a generation later, 20-30 years after deindustrialization.

The study found that the economic restructuring that occurred a generation after the deindustrialization altered the factors that affected the transition from high school to college and work for children in working class families. Financial stress and financial instability weighed more heavily on the present generation. College was seen as an investment in the 1985-1995 generational group, whereas college is a gamble for the 2005-2015 group. The 2005-2015 working class group saw themselves as "too rich" for grants, but "too poor" to afford college. While parent expectations for educational attainment remain the same for all participants, the latter group has fewer community ties and a greater reliance on educators in the high school.

The study concludes with recommendations that include interventions in the areas of college and career counseling, an examination of rural college and career readiness, critical pedagogical and collective impact approaches. The study calls upon school leadership to articulate competing discourses that shape educational practice and policy, and to be informed by the awareness that students' subjective experiences of their lives are embedded within economic, political and social structures, as they attempt to intervene in the lives of young adults who will enter a precarious labor market.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This is an ethnographic case study that sought to understand the interplay of school-based and non-school-based factors that influenced high school students' decisions as they graduated and made the transition from school to college and work. Two generational groups of alumni from working class families in the same high school were studied. The first group was comprised of those who graduated from Park High School in the decade that followed the closure of the Burlington Northern railroad in Livingston, Montana in 1985. The second group was comprised of those who graduated a generation later, between the years of 2005-2015, 20-30 years after deindustrialization.

Setting of the Study

The city of Livingston, Montana is situated near the Great Bend of the Yellowstone River, 56 miles from the Northern entrance of Yellowstone Park, where the Yellowstone turns from flowing north to flowing east. Surrounded by four mountain ranges, the area was an intersection of converging trails. These trails had been used for over 11,000 years by both bison and the Clovis people who entered the area by way of the Bering Land Bridge near the end of the last Ice Age (Brekke, 2014; Brekke, 2007; Lahren, 2006). In his return trip from the Pacific in 1806, Captain William Clark, giving the first written account of the area in a Corp of Discovery journal entry, described it as the coming together of buffalo roads (Brekke, 2014). The Northern Pacific Railroad Company established Livingston in 1882, reorganizing after bankruptcy, in order to

continue westward expansion of track construction past Bismarck, Dakota Territory (Brekke, 2007).

The city is situated on the main east-west route between Seattle and Minneapolis and is flanked by I-90 to the south and Burlington Northern track running through its center. In the 1950's, at its peak in population, the railroad employed 1100 workers and the town had machine shops and the largest repair yard between Tacoma, Washington and Burlington, Iowa. In the 1960 U. S. Census, the population in Livingston was 8,101 (US Census, 1960)¹. In 1985, the Burlington Northern Railroad closed its locomotive repair yard in Livingston, eliminating 360 of its higher-paying jobs, as well as the lion's share of the city's tax revenue (Robbins, 1985). During the same period of time, three of the four local sawmills also closed (Hines, 2004). Although, by 1990, the population in Livingston shrank to 6,051 residents (U. S. Census, 1990), the population then rebounded due to urban-to-rural migration into the area (Hines, 2004).

By 2013, the population of a de-industrialized Livingston was 7,136, with children under 18 comprising 21% of the population. An increasing number of jobs, approximately 25%, are in the accommodation and food services fields. Mining, sawmill, and construction work, including current work in the Bakken oil fields of Eastern Montana and North Dakota, comprise higher paying, but historically unstable jobs. Montana Rail Link (MRL) now operates the Livingston Rebuild Center in

¹ The Polk City Directory of 1950 reported the Livingston population to be 10,500. (R. L. Polk & Co.), p xii

Livingston, employing 100 full-time workers (Banham, 1990, personal communication MRL, 2015).

This geographic area has been a place of intersecting trails for over 11,000 years. The intersection today is one vastly different from that used by the Clovis people who walked on the Old North Trail. At today's intersection in 2015 is a rural community born of industry, now with a deindustrialized economic base. It is a community where its children still make their way around on bicycles and skateboards. Squarely situated at the intersection are children and their families, some with clear visions of their future and the means to get there, others, wanting upward economic mobility, but not sure how to get there, and still others, barely stopping, needing to move on so that they can find work or better work. Between the family, the community, and the network of youth-serving institutions are the public schools², where most of the youth come to be educated.

Background of the Study

This researcher is principal of the local high school in Livingston, a school with an enrollment of approximately 500 students. The high school is the largest in Park County, as Livingston is the county seat and its biggest city. These students live in the city and within the county. Although homogeneous in ethnicity, the school is diverse socioeconomically. While 12.7% of the population lived below the poverty level

² At the time of this writing, schools in the community are grade level organized by building, thereby eliminating socioeconomically class-based neighborhood configurations: a kindergarten center, a first and second grade school, a third through fifth grade building, a sixth through eighth middle school and ninth through twelfth high school.

between 2009-2013, the number of students who qualified for free or reduced meals in the Livingston School District hovers around 50%³. At the time of this study there is one small private high school in Livingston. Most youth attend Park High School (formerly called Park County High School). The school has been classified by the accountability measures used in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as being “in need of improvement,” having missed making the mark in test scores or graduation rates for several years running. In accordance with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) rules, a school had not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) if it had not reached NCLB testing or graduation rate targets in either the “All Students” population or in one of the sub-groups, such as Economically Disadvantaged students or Special Education Students. Partly due to its accountability status, the faculty and leadership of the school has engaged in the process of internal redesign, examining a possible overhaul of major aspects of education: content and curriculum, structure and use of time, student and teacher relationships, pedagogy and instructional approaches, proving learning – assessment and grading, and professional development and collegiality. This researcher and the high school faculty are working at a grassroots community level to attempt to figure out how to best rethink institutional practices and curriculum offerings in order to launch students into their futures in a deindustrialized community and a rural state.

³ Free and reduced meal rates are based on family incomes that are 185% above the federal poverty rate, thereby attempting to take care of children in families who are in near-poverty. Schools that have over 50% of students who qualify for free and reduced meal rates may be considered “Title 1 Schools” which is an acknowledgement of the severity of poverty in the community and the challenges which manifest in the schools due to the effects of poverty.

As the study begins in 2015, the researcher begins her twenty-fourth year as an educator⁴, fourth year as high school principal and twelfth year as a resident of Livingston. At the high school over the past few years, focus groups and conversations with parents, students, and community members reveal the divide between those who are attempting to be first generation college-going families, those who have the social and economic capital to navigate high school with a vision and plan for their futures, those who have physical, mental, situational or economic barriers, as evidenced by high mobility, poverty and near-poverty, and those who hope for upward economic mobility through skilled jobs in the trades or in farming or ranching. Also observing what other researchers have found, (Silva, 2013; Howley, 2009; Weis, 1990; Willis, 1977) have found, the low level of social trust by some families regarding the institution of school is evident in this community as well, particularly from working class and first generation college-going families. Students and their families are confused about how they are economically situated – they are skeptical about whether the “college for all” mantra will work for them, especially if they want to stay in their hometown. In the recent past, students wanted to believe that the stories about the oilfields – drive a truck in the Bakken, or wait for the oil pipeline to come through Montana⁵ and make \$80,000 a year or more, that they can earn the “good money” their grandparents were able to earn when they went to work for the railroad 35 years ago. Some students have seen their parents or

⁴ nine years as an elementary level teacher and eleven years with the dual role of superintendent and principal in two small independent public school districts

⁵ At the time of this writing, there will be no pipeline coming through Montana and the oilfields in the Bakken are undergoing severe cutbacks (2016).

family members burdened for years with school loan debt and underemployed, and are leery of getting themselves into this situation.

For those who do have a vision of their future, their path appears clearer and the school and community works together easily. For example, PHS has made available private college coaching for interested students and parents, funded first by a local private foundation and now a local investment firm. While many will say they are taking a “gap year” the reality is that they sense they don’t have the means to take control of their fates in the labor market, so they stay put, work at service level jobs during the tourist season and hope for a better, financially stable future.

From this researcher’s perspective, both faculty and administrators in the school district experience pressure as they attempt to meet the myriad academic, social, emotional, and sometimes physical needs (as in helping a student find clothing, food, or a place to spend the night) of their students, while also working to raise test scores and graduation rates, engage all students in learning (from the disengaged to the highly engaged), develop new and innovative instructional strategies, and personalize learning to meet the wide variety of skill and interest levels in their classrooms in any given period of the day. The guidance staff at PHS works to provide information on how to assist students, particularly first-generation college students, in making the transition from high school to college and work. In the end, while approximately 80% of students in the high school indicate they want to attend college (Livingston: Park High School), between 35% and 45% of students actually do go on to two- or four-year colleges in the first two years after high school graduation (Montana Office of Public Instruction, Reports and Data).

Statement of the Problem

Public high schools in the United States have been charged with assisting students and raising expectations so that students are “college and career ready”. Being college and career ready (CCR) means that an individual has the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary for success in postsecondary education and economically viable career pathways in a 21st century economy (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2012). This study seeks to understand how students prepare for college and career in a deindustrialized working-class community where jobs and careers that allow for upward economic mobility are scarce and the purpose for education beyond high school is too often not seen. Livingston, Montana is typical of many communities, where for over a century, one could make a secure living and raise a family without education beyond high school. For some, there remains continued skepticism about the value of post-secondary education, particularly if one wants to pursue work in the trades or stay in the rural community. In core subjects, there is an attitude of just ‘getting by’ when students cannot connect academic work and knowledge to their future. For some, particularly those who are the first in their family to enter college, there is anxiety associated with the college application and financing process. For some, there is a lack of planning or even imagining their future after high school.

In two classic studies that examine working-class youth as they move through high school in urban deindustrializing or deindustrialized communities, it is not uncommon for students and families to, on the one hand, value and acknowledge the need for an education, while on the other hand, eschewing school knowledge and the kind of

work ethic that makes one a successful student. (Weiss, 1990; Willis, 1977) Weiss described how, the parents of Freeway students, knowing that work at the steel plant was no longer an option for their children, and wanting their children to have a stable economic future, promoted schooling and college as a way to gain individual social and economic mobility, even though they likely did not know how to navigate the process. This, though, was in contradiction to a working class identity that valued manual labor over mental labor. While Willis's study of 'the lads' of Hammertown describes how, in both the active rebellion to and the passive resistance of schooling, the lads disqualify themselves from college and higher paying careers.

From this researcher's perspective as high school principal and resident of the community, to be CCR entails considerably more than increasing the number of credits in core courses needed for graduation from high school, as federal policy suggests. Understanding the realities and complexities of students' lives, their perspectives and the challenges they and their families face may lead to figuring out how to best assist them through their high school years. This study seeks to understand the impact of family, community, economic and social change from one generation to the next in a deindustrialized community on a high school's ability to understand how students make the transition from secondary education to college and careers. While much of the educational and sociological research has been focused on urban deindustrialized working class communities, less is known about rural deindustrialized working class communities, particularly in the Northwest United States, and how life contexts changed from one generation to the next.

Purpose of the Study

Through the use of multigenerational personal experiences, with the awareness that one's subjective experiences are embedded within a social, economic and political structure (Luker, 2008), the purpose of the study is to understand the influence and interplay of economic and social factors in a rural deindustrialized community as students make the transition from high school to college and work. The study seeks to understand and describe the school-based and non-school-based factors that influenced the transition from high school to career and work for those Park High School students from working-class families who graduated from high school in the decade following deindustrialization and for those who graduated from high school 20-30 years following deindustrialization. It is hoped that this ethnographic case study will provide greater depth to the body of existing knowledge on how working class high school students from deindustrialized rural communities make decisions about their next steps into adulthood. The final chapter will explore current implications for school leadership in improving the transition from high school to college and career.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

- (1) Immediately after the deindustrialization⁶ of a rural community:

⁶ "Immediately after deindustrialization" refers to the time period directly after the Burlington Northern railroad closure: 1985-1995.

- a. What were the factors from outside the school that influenced students' path from high school to college and work?
 - b. How did those factors from outside the school influence the students' path from high school to college and work?
 - c. What were the school-based factors that influenced students' path from high school to college and work?
 - d. How did those school-based factors influence students' path from high school to college and work?
- (2) In the 20-30 years (distantly after) following the deindustrialization⁷ of a rural community:
- a. What were the factors from outside the school that influenced students' path from high school to college and work?
 - b. How did those factors from outside the school influence students' path from high school to college and work?
 - c. What were the school-based factors that influenced students' path from high school to college and work?
 - d. How did those school-based factors influence students' path from high school to college and work?

⁷ “Distantly after deindustrialization” refers to the time period 20-30 years after the Burlington Northern railroad closure: 2005-2015.

Subjects for this study will be students who attended and left Park High School (due to graduation, transfer or dropping out) between the years of 2005-2015 and those who attended and left Park High between 1985-1995, the years immediately following deindustrialization. Semi-structured interviews of these alumni will explore school experiences, community and family supports, how the transition from high school into college or work occurred. The concluding chapter of this study will use the results to discuss the results and implications for school leadership teams.

The Significance of this Study

While there is a significant body of research that examines transitions from high school to post-secondary education and work, much of the cited work does not have a focus on students from working class families who live in rural deindustrialized communities, particularly in the Northwest United States. Recent research concludes that rural youth are less likely than non-rural youth to attend and remain in college regardless of academic achievement. (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2015; Pierson & Hanson, 2015; Johnson, Showalter, Klein & Lester, 2014)

Byun, et al (2015), in discussing the lack of research concerning rural youth college attendance patterns, supports further research in how attending a rural high school shapes pathways after graduation from high school. This study hopes to add to the body of knowledge that is emerging regarding rural students and the transition from high school to college and career in the northwest United States. For example, in making the transition from high school to college or work, what decisions might be attributed to

socioeconomic status, ties to the rural community, difficulties accessing post-secondary education due to planning or quality of education? In order to improve college access and readiness efforts, there needs to be a better understanding of what influence youth making the transition from high school to adulthood.

Interpretive Framework

Creswell (2007) discusses how researchers bring their own worldviews to their research projects. The qualitative research study is molded further by the researcher's interpretive framework as the literature is examined, data is collected, results are interpreted and conclusions are reached. Creswell goes on to say that responsible researchers make worldviews, interpretive frameworks, and philosophical assumptions as explicit as possible (p. 19).

This research study comes out of the worldview that reality is socially constructed. In this worldview, "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" and "the goal of research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (Cresswell, 2007, p. 20). As subjective experiences and meanings are rooted in a social, economic and political structure (Luker, 2008), the researcher attempts to understand the historical and cultural aspects of individuals' lives and work (Cresswell, 2007). How individuals interpret their choices and experiences as they made the transition from high school to college or work is influenced by a number of factors, both school-based and non-school-based. This study used the participants' views of this transition in order to understand the steps taken.

Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) state that an interpretive framework “identifies the concepts included in a complex phenomenon and shows their relationships” (p. 117). This research study examined how both school-based factors and factors from outside the school influenced path of students from high school to college and work for two generations of students from working class families who attended the same high school in the same community. The researcher sought first to understand the complexities of the interplay of factors on the individuals who lived in a rural community and then looked at these factors in relation to the high school’s efforts to prepare students for college and career success.

The interpretive framework used in this ethnographic case study draws from critical theory. In a general sense, critical theory explores social institutions with a goal of identifying structures and motivations, and of transformation or envisioning new possibilities (Bohman, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Knowledge gained by a critical framework may lead to “an ideological critique of power, privilege and oppression in areas of educational practice (Merriam, 1998, p. 4). Creswell (2007) goes on to say that “central themes that a critical researcher might explore include the study of social institutions and their transformations through interpreting the meanings of social life” (p. 27). This study seeks to understand how students from a working class socioeconomic background navigated the post-high school graduation transition. Weis (1990), in her study of urban high school students in a deindustrializing economy, concludes with “I encourage others to look carefully at the identities of the working class and others as we

move into post-industrial society. It is, after all, our future and that of our children that is at stake here” (p. 214).

The public school system, as Reese (2005) describes in his work on the history of public school reform, is a system that reflects the political, cultural and economic tension of any given moment. Institutional ethnography also informs this study as this interpretive framework looks at the way activities in the local setting are structured and shaped by institutional relations that are beyond the local. How a school or a community is structured, school and other governmental initiatives, school accountability measures and so on, tend to originate outside the local setting (Smith, 1987, 2005). This method of inquiry begins in the subjects’ experiences (Griffith and Smith, 2005). The subjects in this study are from working class families and all have experiences in the same school and the same community, one group immediately following deindustrialization and the other group, a generation later, distantly following deindustrialization. As well, it utilizes the researcher’s “insider” knowledge of everyday life and work in order to elucidate unarticulated social relations.

Method/Research Design

The purpose of scientific research is to expand knowledge. No one research methodology is able fully comprehend a given situation or problem (Gay, 2009).

Although the scientific method provides an orderly process for gaining knowledge, it also has limitations. Gay (2009) advises that a research method is best chosen after the research question has been determined. The qualitative research design used in this study

is that of an ethnographic case study. The study utilized elements of both ethnography and case study to answer the research questions.

In ethnography, the unit of analysis is a group that shares the same culture (Cresswell, 2007). According to Merriam (1998), a case study design is “employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (p. 19). Merriam goes on to say that a case is a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 27). In this study, deindustrialization forms the boundaries of the study, both immediately after railroad layoffs, from 1985-1995 and distantly after, from 2005-2015. While utilizing ethnography for both research framework and data collection and analysis techniques, the case studied is the specific issue of how students from working class families transitioned from high school to college and work. The methods used in this ethnographic case study will be defined in the methodology section of this dissertation.

Limitations

This is a small study and is limited to the experiences of those who were interviewed. Findings are, as Silva explains in Putnam (2015) illustrations, not proof. The purpose of the narratives is not to provide a representative sample, but to explain the ways in which the categories of analysis accurately portray the trends uncovered. This study also takes place in a rural state. While it may contribute to the body of knowledge concerning student transition from high school to college and work in the northwest United States, the results are context specific.

Delimitations

As researcher, the following self-selected boundaries were put in place in this study. All participants attended the same high school in the same community. Participants were limited by the year of their graduating class: 1985-1995 and 2005-2015. All but one participant interviewed had fathers who met the definition of working class as meaning that their father had not graduated from a four-year college. An equal number of men and women in each generational group were interviewed.

Positionality

The researcher is both a participant and an observer. Cresswell defines participant observation as “The ethnographer gathers information in many ways, but the primary approach is to observe the culture-sharing group and become a participant in the cultural setting” (p. 243). As a public school educator for nearly a quarter of a century, and as the leader of the high school – the school under scrutiny in this study, the researcher was aware of how community members could react to her. Potential participants who had quite negative experiences with the school or with the researcher did likely not self-select to be interviewed. She is also aware that her own institutional defensiveness and the normalization of many aspects of schooling that come out of decades within the institution may make it difficult to be open to perspectives that differ from her own. A third element to be considered is that while the researcher grew up and attended an urban high school as the daughter of a working class father, she has lived in rural communities in the rural state of Montana for all of her adult life – over 35 years.

Introduction to the Literature Review

The goal of the second chapter is to provide an overview and synthesis of the research that is relevant to this study. The literature review begins with public school change in terms of reform and policy initiatives from the federal to state to local levels. The policy initiative that is currently referred to college and career readiness, and factors that influence the transition from high school to adulthood with a focus on students from working class students is explored. This section concludes with school and community-specific information that informs this study.

Summary

Public high schools in the United States have been charged with preparing students so that they have the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary for success in postsecondary education and economically viable career pathways in a 21st century economy. This study examines the problem of how to prepare students for college and work in a rural deindustrialized working-class community where jobs and careers that allow for upward economic mobility are scarce and the purpose for education beyond high school is not seen. The purpose of the study is to identify the influence and interplay of factors and to understand how those factors influenced the transition from high school graduation to work and college for those students from working class backgrounds who came into adulthood in the decade immediately after deindustrialization of a community and a generation after deindustrialization occurred. The introduction gives the context and setting of the study that seeks to add to a growing

body of knowledge on how to assist young men and women from working class backgrounds in rural deindustrialized communities as they make their path from high school graduation to college and work.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Those who stayed in Livingston have found other jobs, and many now believe their children’s futures will be secured not with promises from corporate officials but with a good college education.” (C. Bosley, interview by Keffer, 1997)

“No job is guaranteed anymore. You know, it used to be like when you did get a job on the railroad, you were set for life.” (C. Bosley, interview by Keffer, 1997)

Introduction

How does a high school prepare students for college and work in a rural deindustrialized working-class community where jobs and careers that allow for upward economic mobility are scarce and the purpose for education beyond high school is sometimes not seen?

The purpose of the study is to identify the influence and interplay of factors that are both school-based and those that originate out the school and to understand how those factors influenced the transition from high school to work and college. The experiences of two generations of alumni from working class backgrounds are the subjects of this study. The participants in this study all attended the same high school and consider themselves to have been average or above average students. Most spent their entire lives in the community. One group graduated from high school came into adulthood in the decade immediately after deindustrialization, the 1985 event of the Burlington Northern

railroad closing its shops in Livingston Montana. The second group graduated from high school and came into adult and a generation (20-30 years) after this event occurred.

A school is a complex system, influenced by both school and non-school, local and non-local forces. An effective leadership team helps a school make sense of the pressure it experiences, on the one hand, to educate so that students have 21st century knowledge, attitudes and skills so that they may experience success in college and work endeavors, while on the other hand, understanding that school is a part of a larger community, or as Putnam (2015) puts it, an “echo chamber,” where the experiences, the advantages and disadvantages that students bring into the doors are echoed back inside the school walls. How do high school students who are members of rural working class families, families who, most likely, have not saved for their college education, and are living from paycheck-to-paycheck, grow a vision of possible college and career choices when jobs that provide upward economic mobility are scarce?

The following chapter is a presentation of the history, research and thinking pertinent to this study. The chapter begins with discussion of public school reform, followed by career and college readiness policy initiatives, rural school challenges and the conflict between formal educational discourse and rural community discourse. A summary of the research that describes the interplay of various school and non-school factors, including the discourses of equality of opportunity and of self-reliance are discussed. The chapter ends with description of the setting of this case study, Livingston, Montana.

Public School Reform

K-12 public schools carry out reforms and initiatives that reflect the dominant societal and political goals and ideologies of the day (Reese, 2005). While largely under state legal control and local governance, public schools historically and legally operate in a decentralized fashion (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010). This model frustrates educational reformers, as sweeping changes, especially those that are to reach the classroom, occur very slowly. Large reform efforts originating at the federal level are devised to be solutions to intractable societal problems (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995). While critics argue that problems such as poverty, racial, and social injustice start outside the classroom and need to be solved outside the classroom (Anyon, 1981, 2005; Anyon and Greene, 2007; Apple, 2004, 2011; Noddings, 2007), schools are nonetheless looked to as the source of the problems and/or the solution to the problems, and educational reform and policy change begins anew (Reese, 2005).

The common means used to change and reform public school policies, practices and pedagogies generally come in the form of mandates and incentives (Reese, 2005). States, school districts, schools and classrooms then employ a variety of practices in order to respond to reform efforts. Cho and Lewis (2005) state that in this time of late capitalism, an important goal of education is to supply the society with the type of skilled labor the economic structure needs. Innovative U.S. high schools in 2015, including the high school at the center of this study, offer STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) courses and computer coding classes in order to encourage more students into the skilled jobs needed to grow the economy. At the site of this research study and in other

rural areas in Montana, including Indian reservations, it is often difficult for students to envision themselves in future work that does not or does not appear to exist in their community or to envision themselves forced to live a life outside of their community (Bryant, 2010; Byun, 2012).

College and Career Ready

The focus of this section is not to give a comprehensive definition of CCR, but to discuss relevant aspects as it pertains to first-generation college-going students. The Montana Office of Public Instruction states that “Workforce projection by the U.S. Department of Labor show that by 2018, nine of the 10 fastest-growing occupations that require at least a bachelor’s degree will also require significant scientific or mathematic training.” (Montana Office of Public Instruction Graduation Matters Toolkit, n.d.) While states have varying definitions of the term “college and career ready” (CCR), the definition used in Massachusetts and Montana are similar, that an individual who graduates from high school has the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary for success in postsecondary education and economically viable career pathways in a 21st century economy (Massachusetts Department of Education, n.d.).

Conley (2014) synthesizes evolving policy initiatives and definitions of CCR. He discusses that in the high-skills knowledge economy that is developing, whether one holds a blue- or a white-collar job, learning new skills and mastering new areas is required. While English and math skills are necessary and the foundation of learning, they are not “ends in and of themselves anymore. They serve as tools to explore

possibilities, acquire skills and venture deeper into specific areas” (Conley, 2014, p. 13).

Conley goes on to discuss the deficits of the traditional measures that have used as the gatekeeper for college and career readiness, such as standardized tests scores and GPA.

He questions the traditional model of viewing college readiness as “the absence of remediation” (p. 14) in math, writing, and reading. He offers up this definition of CCR:

A college and career ready student possesses the content knowledge, strategies, skills, and techniques necessary to be successful in any of a range of postsecondary setting. Success is defined as the ability to complete entry-level courses at a level of performance that is sufficient to enable students to continue to the next courses in their chosen field of study. Not every student needs exactly the same knowledge and skills to be college and career ready. (Conley, 2014, p. 14)

It is especially crucial that college admissions, most notably when dealing with first-generation college-going students and rural students, make “contextually sensitive decisions” (p. 15) about placement by understanding the student’s goals, figuring out if the student has the ability to self-reflect on performance, persistence, and the ability to ask for help when needed.

Rural School Challenges

In 2003-04, over half of all operating school districts and one-third of all public schools in the United States were in rural areas (Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007). Nearly 10 million students attend schools in rural areas in the United States; this equates to 19% of the total public school enrollment in the United States (Provasnik et al, 2007). The 2013 *Why Rural Matters* reports that more than half of the rural students in the U.S. go to school in just eleven states, states which

are among the most urban and populated states, for example, Texas, Georgia, Michigan, California and New York (Johnson, Showalter, Klein & Lester, 2014). As 75.3% of schools in Montana were designated by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) as rural (Johnson, et al., 2014), Montana received the dire highest priority quartile ranking of “critical” for policymakers to evaluate and address rural education issues. The NCES utilizes a twelve-category locale code system continuum that ranges from “large city” to “rural, remote.” The community at the center of this study is on the rural end of the continuum, and is designated as a “remote town⁸.” Roellke (2003), among others, argue that federal policies and programs which address the intractable problems of urban schools and which are devised to be for the good of the all, meaning urban and rural students as well as high, medium, and low poverty students, often do not make sense for rural school districts. (Roellke, 2003; Jimerson, 2005)

In 2007 NCES reported that 35 percent of rural students live below the poverty level, 38 percent qualify for free or reduced-lunch programs, and another 26.3 percent of rural residents live just above the poverty line. For Native American children, 79 percent live in poverty (Provasnik et al, 2007). Poverty and near-poverty, coupled with isolation and the distinct challenges and issues that come with each community complicate the kinds of decisions made by educational leaders.

⁸ A “remote town” is defined as a territory inside an urban cluster (Livingston, Montana) that is more than 30 miles from an urbanized area. An urbanized area is one where the principal city has a population of at least 100,000 as determined by the latest census.

In the 2013 *Why Rural Matters* report, while Montana has a relatively low unemployment rate (6.3% -29th lowest in the country) for rural adults, there is a very low median household income. The authors suggest that this may be due to a lack of higher paying jobs, a large population of working poor in rural areas, and out-migration, for example, to the Bakken oilfields by frustrated workers, or a combination of these factors (Johnson, et al., 2014).

In 2009, the Rural High School Aspirations Study (RHSA) conducted by the National Research Center on Rural Education Support found that approximately 89% of rural high school students had aspirations to attain a (two or four year) college degree or an advanced degree. The 8000 students in this study were from 74 rural high schools across 34 states in the United States. (Irvin & Meece, 2011). Additional findings concluded that most students had not participated in school-to-work transition programs including job shadowing, career internships or apprenticeships. At the family level, the study found that those students who had experienced family hardship and those who had a greater level of identification with their parents tended to not aspire to postsecondary education. Students whose parents voiced their hope for them to attend college did tend to want to go to college. Also found was that students who took a college preparatory-type curriculum in high school, those who viewed themselves as valuing school and academics, and those who felt a sense of belonging had higher aspirations to attend college (RHSA, n.d.)

The RHSA study examines conflicting messages that rural educators face as they attempt to prepare students for life after high school. On the one hand, most students in

the study had a desire to stay or to return to their rural communities. On the other hand, most rural communities have faced declines in farming, extractive, and manufacturing industries, so the ability to contribute economically to the community is difficult (Irvin & Meece, 2011). In his study of gifted males, referred to as “bright rednecks,” Howley (2009) refers to rural schools as the “talent-extraction industry” brought about by urbanization, industrialization. The study concluded that while rural adolescents tend to have a high level of social capital, as indicated by family, school, and community supports, they struggle with financial resources and planning for postsecondary education. The authors advise rural school personnel to understand the barriers their students face in order to help them to achieve their goals.

Transitioning from High School to Adulthood

In examining the differences between rural and non-rural college attendance patterns, Byun, et al (2015) note that suburban youth are the most likely to attend college, followed by urban youth. Rural youth are the least likely to attend college. Their research findings concluded that rural high school graduates who enroll in college are less likely to be continuously enrolled and are significantly less likely to first attend a selective college compared to their non-rural counterparts. The authors contend that these findings are explained by the low family socioeconomic states and by the lack of adequate high school college-prep curricula.

Arnett (2007) describes how the influence of economic factors of the past few decades in industrialized countries has dramatically affected how adolescents move from

high school into adulthood. He references Erickson (1950) who described that some of the most challenging work of the adolescent is being able to take one's interests, experiences and aptitudes in order explore possibilities for one's future work. Arnett hypothesizes that this appears to be no longer happening in adolescence, but in the time period between 19 and 25 years of age, which he refers to as emerging adulthood. He goes on to describe that as the economy moves from a manufacturing base to a knowledge and information skill base, and as approximately 60% of young adults enter some kind of postsecondary education, it takes longer for adolescents to move into an adulthood with full responsibilities such as running one's own life, paying bills and settling down with partner. While the high school in this case study has over 80% of its students who aspire to postsecondary education, less than 50% enroll in the two years after graduation. How, then, does high school and the community best support its adolescents and emerging adults as they try to find their way, as they attempt to grow up?

Complex Factors at Work

This ethnographic case study attempts to understand the factors that influenced the post-high school path for two generations of students, one in the decade that immediately followed deindustrialization, and the second group, a generation later. The following section gives an overview of research and discussion of school-based and non-school based factors that are pertinent to this study.

In an ethnographic study of men and women, 24-34 years of age, from cities that have had a decline in industry and an increase in the growth of lower paying service

industry jobs such as health, leisure and hospitality, Silva (2013) explores lives of working class young adults who no longer have available to them the traditional pathways to upward economic mobility. The study reveals that there are, in reality, few choices and a deepening social inequality and economic insecurity exists for many working class young adults (p. 8, p. 146-147). Silva describes how working class wages have decreased by 12 percent since 1973 and by 26 percent for those who are without a high school diploma. For those who once employed in industry like the railroad, the steelworker, or the coal miner, there has been a decline in job security, employment opportunities, and health insurance contributions made by employers, as well as access to pensions (p. 15). She goes on to say that the counterpart to the American working-class man has been “displaced to the service economy” where they are poorly paid and are vulnerable to layoffs (p. 15). Silva contends that young men and women in many working class communities live a very different economic climate than their parents and grandparents and that the conditions of economic and cultural uncertainty. She describes how a middle class ideology that presumes choice pervades our thinking – that one can be whatever one desires, if one works hard enough or wants it enough (p. 7). Silva’s ethnography of 100 working-class young adults in deindustrialized cities in the eastern United States illustrates the “absence of choices” (p. 8) for many working class youth of the 21st century. *Coming Up Short* (Silva, 2014) also reveals that young men and women have a low level of social trust by the time they are seniors in high school, feeling disappointed in and not trusting the educational institutions that might help them make a

transition from high school that could lead them to upward economic mobility. This interplay of factors is elaborated upon in the next section.

Complex Factors: Social Networks and Educational Aspirations

In the aforementioned RHSA study, Byun, Meece, Irvin and Hutchins (2012) look closely at how school and family social capital interacts with educational aspirations for approximately 6000 students. Calling on Putnam's work in *Bowling Alone* (2000), there is a strong correlation "as close to perfect as social scientists ever find in data analyses of this sort" (p. 297) between high social capital and positive child development. For youth, social capital refers to social connectedness, the informal ties one has to family, friends, school and community activities and groups. Byun, et al (2012), results found that family and school social capital played a crucial role in shaping educational aspirations for rural youth – beyond a youth's socioeconomic situation and demographic background.

Examining a plethora of data, Putnam's latest study (2015) concludes that while social networks (and communities) are "powerful resources for child development and social mobility" (p. 226), for those in poorer communities, there is evidence of growing social isolation and less social trust in both neighbors and in institutions such as schools, church and government.

In discussing the development of educational aspirations after high school, the socioeconomic challenges in many rural communities, and the scarcity of careers that allow for upward economic mobility, Byun, et al (2012) and Putnam (2015) discuss the advantages of both "weak ties" and "strong ties" when examining social networks and

access to opportunities. “Strong ties” refer to close family and friends, those we might rely on for both emotional and perhaps even material support. “Weak ties” refer to “connections to wider, more diverse networks. The reach and diversity of these social ties are especially valuable for social mobility and educational and economic advancement...” (p. 208). In Putnam’s ethnographic research of two groups – affluent and working class/near poverty, he found that the lower SES group had disproportionately more strong ties – extended family and maybe a few friends and neighbors, and almost no weak ties – people who could help with college or careers, for example. Putnam goes on to discuss how weak ties are not only good for getting help with college or a job, it is also a good “air bag” to be deployed to mitigate the mistakes of adolescence. In *Bowling Alone*, in 2000, utilizing a state side-by-side comprehensive social capital index, which took into account measures of informal sociability, volunteerism, measures of social trust, community organizational life, and engagement in public affairs, North and South Dakota were ranked very high, while Montana was ranked high. Fifteen years after Putnam’s original research in *Bowling Alone*, studies done a decade later in 2010 confirm that class differences in social networks, especially non-kin or “weak ties” networks have shrunk. “In effect, they found, Americans’ social networks are collapsing inward, and now consist of fewer, denser, more homogeneous, more familial (and less non-kin) ties” (p. 211).

Complex Factors: School Involvements

The research surrounding extracurricular involvements in high school is extensive⁹. In a 2003 national longitudinal study that followed 8600 students from their eighth grade year in 1988 to two years after their 1992 graduation from high school found that students in eighth through twelfth grades who were consistently active (versus periodically involved) in extracurricular activities were 70 percent more likely to go on to postsecondary education. As well, the study found these students were more likely to exhibit behaviors such as voting and volunteering for community service (Zaff, Moore, Pappillo and Williams, 2003). While this study did not control for students who lived in rural environs, Putnam, utilizing national high school surveys¹⁰ shows a growing SES class gap in participation in school-based extracurricular activities between 1972 and 2002 in the following table adapted from Putnam (2015, p. 174). This is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Involvement in school extracurricular activities between 1972-2002.

	Percent of high school seniors participating in school extracurricular activities			
High School Seniors Family Income Status	1972	1982	1992	2002
Lowest SES quartile	77%	78%	73%	65%
Highest SES quartile	86%	88%	86%	86%

⁹ Putnam (2015) in his endnotes offers an extensive list of peer-reviewed research that links extracurricular activities to adolescent development, academic achievement and educational attainment (p. 332-333).

¹⁰ The national high school surveys drawn on by Putnam include the National Longitudinal Study of 1972, High School and Beyond (1980), National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (Putnam, 2015, p. 177).

In 1972, 86% of students from families in the highest SES quartile were involved in school-based extracurricular activities while 77% of students from families in the lowest SES quartile participated. Thirty years later, in 2002, 86% of students from affluent families were involved in school extracurricular activities while the percentage of students from poor families involved dropped to 65%.

Complex Factors: Family
Finances and Educational Attainment

There is an extensive and growing body of research on how family stress, particularly about time and money affect a child's development. Putnam (2015, 2000) utilized questions related to family income and debt in the DDB Needham Life Style surveys between 1975 and 2005 to gauge the level of financial stress felt by parents. Results show that in 1975, about 21% of parents with a high school education or less felt that experienced a high level of stress about finances compared to 13% of parents with a bachelor's degree or more. In 2005 this gap grew, with 20% of parents with bachelor's degrees experiencing high financial stress compared to 44% of parents with high school degrees or less.

Putnam contends that a generation ago, one's socioeconomic status played less of a role than it does today, relative to one's academic accomplishments, in how far one would go in their level of educational attainment. In the two following tables, he shows that a family's income level now matters more than test scores in determining educational attainment as we enter the 21st century. Utilizing the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002-2012, adjusted for prior dropouts, the follow table shows the Class of 2004 and

their educational attainment between 2004 and 2012 by family SES (Adapted from Putnam, 2015, p. 189).

Table 2. Educational attainment by family SES for the class of 2004.

Class of 2004 Family Income Status	College retention and graduation for the Class of 2004			
	Graduated from high school in 2004	Applied to college in 2004	Enrolled in college by 2006	Completed BA by 2012
Lowest SES quartile	64%	59%	46%	12%
Highest SES quartile	92%	90%	89%	58%

While nearly all of those from affluent family had enrolled in college two years after graduating from high school, 89%, 46% of those from poor families enrolled. By 2012, 12% of students from poor families completed college as compared to 58% of students from affluent families. Putnam, in attempting to tease out the various factors that lead up to the gap in college graduation rates, contends that it is not solely the factors of college costs and student debt, but the cumulative effect of complex factors, such as those discussed in this study. MacTavish and Salamon (2006), too, in their study of pathways available to rural youth growing up in low resource settings, such as the trailer park in which their study took place, reveals various factors at play, including financial stress and less guidance from parents in planning for higher education and/or work after high school, when compared to middle class counterparts.

In attempting to isolate factors that influence educational attainment, the following table shows the percent of students who graduate from college by SES and 8th

grade test scores. Using the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988

(NELS:88/2000), Fourth follow-up, and adapted from Putnam (2015, p. 190):

Table 3. Educational attainment by family socioeconomic status and 8th grade test scores.

Family SES	Percent graduating from college		
	Low test scores in 8 th grade	Medium test scores in 8 th grade	High test scores in 8 th grade
Bottom quartile	3%	8%	29%
Top quartile	30%	51%	74%

Students from poor families who have low or medium test scores have a significantly lower likelihood of graduating from college. Students from affluent families with low test scores are more likely to graduate from college than students from low-income families with high test scores, calling into question the notion of equality of opportunity and merit.

Complex Factors: Educational Aspirations and Rural Community Ties

There is a large body of research that deals with the conflict that rural youth face of their desire to maintain roots in their community while also having aspirations for education or a career that would allow one to make a decent living (Curervo, 2014; Cuervo and Wyn, 2012; Henrickson (2012); Carr and Kefalas, 2009; Howley, 2009; Corbett, 2007; Howley, 2006). Howley (2006), in explaining why fewer rural youth seek postsecondary education as compared to urban and suburban youth, looks at disadvantages associated with rural life, as discussed above, and those who have strong emotional attachments to their families and the community, but experience conflict over

this because they have educational and economic aspirations that are not available to them in the community.

In Carr and Kefalas's ethnography *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America* (2009), the researchers spent a year in the Midwest in 2001 interviewing 275 graduates of a small town high school. The graduates were grouped into "Achievers" who left because they believed that educational and economic futures were elsewhere, "Stayers" who remained in the town and worked at low-paying jobs, "Seekers" who left to see the world, and "Returners" who came back after leaving. The authors point to community leaders as being crucial in figuring out how to creatively engage with youth in an effort to keep them and help the "Stayers."

Corbett in *Learning to Leave: The Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community* (2007) points out the disconnect between rurality and school, with school essentially educating students to leave the community and not giving attention or credence to what it might take to live in the rural community. The setting for Corbett's ethnographic research was Nova Scotia's Digby Neck area at the southwest of the province in the Bay of Fundy. Corbett asked three cohorts of graduates and drop-outs from the Digby Neck Consolidated High School, grouped by decades beginning in 1963-1974, between 1975-1986, and from 1987-1998, what role did the school play in whether they thought they would stay or leave Digby Neck. Corbett connected local economic changes in the fishing industry to the cohorts' perceived relevance of their formal education. In discussing the "Stayers" and the "Leavers", Corbett describes the conflict between the institutional discourse of formal education and rural community discourse, as education

as the “bridge” that leads young men and women away from the rural community. Describing the role of education from the point of view of the rural community, while education provides more opportunities for youth who leave to find work or education not available in the community, it also erodes or “hollows out” the community. Rural schools then become what Howley (2009) referred to earlier as the “talent-extraction industry,” supplying potential workers for urban areas. In his final discussion, while Corbett believed that approaches to curriculum and instruction in rural areas should be place-based pedagogy, project-based learning and critical theory, he also believed that rural education issues are complex and will not be solved with a rural educational system that does not give validity to communitarian approaches that value working for the good of the all (Corbett, 2007).

Collective impact is potentially a mechanism that utilizes a communitarian approach. It is a process whereby “important actors from different sectors” are committed to a “common agenda for solving a specific social problem. These are usually social problems of complexity (Stanford Social Innovation Review, n.d.). “Collective impact initiatives usually involve a centralized infrastructure, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, continuous communication, shared measurement, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants.” Collective impact work that attempts to diminish inequality through efforts such as increased pay for working class and youth, high quality preschool available for all, low cost dual credit classes, and adequate physical and mental health care beginning at birth, are all examples of ongoing efforts within the Livingston community.

Complex Factors:
Education and Parent Expectations

To illustrate the far-reaching implications of socioeconomic class and economic structure of a community, in an earlier ethnographic study of working class high school students, families and educators in a high school in a large city that was de-industrializing due to the closure of steel mills, Weis (1990) reveals in her book titled *Working Class Without Work: High School Students in a Deindustrializing Economy* the complexity and contradictions in regard to getting an education. After spending a year at the high school, she described students as being, for the most part, well-behaved and passive, engaged “in the form rather than the substance of education,” (p. 61) being more interested in getting by with the least amount of effort and less interested in interacting with knowledge or engaging in critical thought. A contradictory code of respect toward schooling and education also existed for parents in relation to teachers. Weis conjectured that these wage labor working class parents had been able to attain jobs that did not require one to take school seriously. So, while parents thought that school was important in order for their children to “move up” or have options in the labor market, they, themselves, had not taken school seriously, and were not actively involved in the education of their children. This was verified by teachers who felt that parents did not appreciate the “mental labor that teachers represent” (p. 174) and that, in fact, parents looked down on them when the mills were operating and they could get paid better than teachers.

Another theme pertinent to this research study was that was expressed by parents in the Weis study (1990) was the desperate desire for their children to attend college. Parents and students did not know how to navigate the college admissions process and

blamed the school for not being more helpful in looking at postsecondary education or not putting them in the correct classes at the high school. While parents saw the high school diploma as an important credential, and tended to want more schooling for their children than they had so that their children might have choices they themselves did not have, there were also contradictory attitudes about school. Weis describes:

Without question, parents infer that the school does not do enough to encourage and prepare students to break into well-paid stable employment in a post-industrial economy. Parents, in a sense, blame the school for what they fear will be their children's future—a future without enough education and one lacking stable employment. In other words, parents fear for their children a future very much like the one they themselves face. They suggest that they, as parents, do their job by “pushing” education to their children and that it is the school's job to see to it that this “push” is transformed into reality. (p. 173)

Weis goes on to describe that, “Teachers, on the other hand, view the “problem” differently. They hold parents responsible for what they see as lack of commitment to education.” (p. 173) Augmenting Weis, in a study of rural student resistance to schooling in Appalachia, Henrickson (2012) described the tensions experienced by students whose schools encouraged college and abstract concepts and parents who valued vocational work. These differing perspectives lead to the next section on competing discourses and how these discourses influence everyday life in a school.

Competing Discourses

As discussed by Reese (2005), school policies and practices reflect the dominant discourses of the day. As rural youth attempt to make sense of their choices, opportunities and challenges as they transition from high school, they do so primarily

through two dominant discourses of equality: that of liberal egalitarianism, as characterized by equality of opportunity and the discourse of neoliberalism, as characterized by the individualized notion of merit and self-reliance (Cuervo, 2014).

Equality of Opportunity

Putnam (2015) echoes the works of Weis and Silva and illustrates how equality of opportunity, and of upward social and economic mobility, differs widely depending on one's socioeconomic class. Putnam describes that public schools are supposed to level the playing field, in order to limit the inequality that comes out of poverty and the near-poverty of many members of the working class, in order to provide equality of opportunity¹¹ for all. Equality of opportunity refers to the ideal held that everyone should be able to get ahead and reach goals if they work hard enough and that achieving one's goals is not dependent on social standing, wealth or connections. It is the institution of school that helps to make America, the land of "opportunity," a reality. For many parents, particularly immigrant and working-class parents, having their children "better themselves" through schooling, combined with hard work and initiative was and remains a deeply held hope, if not an expectation (Laureau, 2012).

Blum (1988) calls into question whether or not the conception of "equality of opportunity" ever was or can be a reality within our current economic structure¹². While

¹¹ Putnam (2015) and Blum (1988) define and give historical and philosophical references that take up with the complexity of attempting to define and describe the principle of "equality of opportunity."

¹² Blum (Rose, 2012) states that the reality of "opportunity" in an economy where large corporations dominate, and where opening a business or professional practice is

working class parents know that their children are not on a level playing field with the children of business and professional families who have their parents' social standing, wealth, and connections to get ahead, they still hold to the ideology of opportunity and do not fully cognize the reality of the situation. Silva (2013) recounts that of the 100 young working-class adults she spoke with:

The majority of the young people I spoke with bounce from one unstable service job to the next, racking up credit card debt to make ends meet and fearing the day when economic shocks – an illness, a school loan coming out of deferment – will erode what little stability they have. (p. 8)

The discourse of liberal egalitarianism, for which the equality of opportunity is the foundation, is seen in educational goals and objectives for how schools address disadvantaged students. A primary charge for public schools today is the closing of the achievement gap for children from different social and economic backgrounds and environs in order to limit the inequality that comes out of poverty and near poverty, in order to provide equality of opportunity for all. (Putnam, 2015; Reese, 2005) A question that remains is how far are schools able to go to level the playing field for children in families and from communities that have significant barriers.

Self-reliance

The second dominant discourse of equality comes out of neoliberalism as characterized by the individualized notion of self-reliance. For the purpose of this study, advocates for this approach place emphasis on the individual's personal responsibility

increasingly out-of-reach due to the economic capital needed to start a business, is, in reality, at best, the "opportunity to compete" with others of equal ability. In this conceptualization, having ability, gumption, and drive may not be enough to get the job.

and choice. Privatization and freedom from government intervention characterize the socio-economic neoliberal approach (Cuervo, 2014). As Silva (2013) described the disruptions that affected the transition to adulthood for working class young men and women in deindustrialized cities, she noted how neoliberal ideology operates at the level of the self: “As an ideology, neoliberalism has promoted self-reliance, rugged individualism...equating lack of state interference and labor market efficiency with human freedom...[human freedom becomes] freedom from government intervention; lower taxes, less regulation, and more labor market flexibility” (p. 14-15). Cuervo notes that “While at a macro-level, education is viewed as a means to build the human capital of a society, at an individual level, it has become an investment and insurance against risk in employment, health and other spheres of life.” (Cuervo, 2013, p. 547)

“If you want to make it, you’ll make it big, but if you want to survive you can do just that,” (Cuervo, 2014, p. 552), remarks a student in a rural high school in Australia in 2012. In this case study of post-school pathways in a rural community, Cuervo describes how teachers, too, felt that it “their job to instill in students an ‘individual drive’ that is ‘probably one of the defining differences between people that take opportunities and people that don’t’ ”(p. 552). Many of the young people in the study believed in equality of opportunity and were able to point out structural inequalities, such as how students whose families had money could get into a university even though they had poor scores, while students from poor families had to get very high scores to be accepted. These young people, simultaneously had a strong belief in the concept of merit, stressing the importance of self-reliance, hard work and careful planning. Cuervo had the sense that

the high school students needed to feel personal autonomy as they grappled with “delocalization” due to leaving their community and the day-to-day structures of family and the community school to go out and get more education, education that would be an “insurance against the unpredictability and complexities of the labour market” (p. 553). While they voiced excitement, there was also the feeling of trepidation. Through internalizing the perspective that their ultimate success or failure would be of their own making, Cuervo reflects, “puts a significant degree of pressure and ‘blame’ on young people” (p. 555) because if they fail to achieve to, for example, get work that allows one to pay the bills and support a family, then this is an individual issue. “There is an increasing acceptance that unfortunately, inequalities exist in the social world but are ultimately the product of ‘choices’, ‘effort’ and ‘responsibilities’ rather than structural inequalities” (p. 555).

Cuervo’s concerns are borne out in Silva’s explanations of how the neoliberal ideology is incorporated at the level of the self. The following explanation of his “failure” is given by a twenty-seven-year old, unemployed black man in Silva’s study as he rejects that racism and poverty could shape his future:

Ethnicity plays in people, but I don’t look at it as a part of my shortcomings, if that makes sense. Every day I look in the mirror, and I could bullshit you right now and tell you anything I wanted to tell you. *But at the end of the day, looking in a mirror, I know where all my shortcomings come from. From the things I either did not do or I did and I just happen to fail at them.* (Silva, 2014, p. 18)

Silva calls this the “hardening against oneself and others” and believes that this is having and will continue to have profound implications on working class youth and young adults.

Competing Discourses at the School Level

The interplay of the dominant discourses of equality of opportunity and self-reliance is often registered as unarticulated pressure within the institution of school.

Educational change theorists, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) note, in describing failing school reform movements:

Teachers have been faced with mounting pressures, ever-rising expectations, and a widening array of responsibilities. Integrating special education students, working with ethnically and linguistically diverse populations, coping with growing amounts of “social work” and emotional problems as support for families outside the school dwindles, and dealing with all the paperwork that results from testing, accountability, data-driven improvement, and bureaucratic regulations – these are just some of the additions to the teacher’s role over the years. (p. 109)

School culture deals with added responsibilities and roles in a variety of ways (Fullan, 2003). For most, finding a way to understand and articulate the pressure is difficult and reactions are mixed, particularly with student populations with barriers, for example, students or families who do not appear to value education. Foucault (1977) identified normalization as the process by which a norm is named, reinforced, and refined. The norm is then seen as rational, natural, and standard, while deviations from the norm are considered deficient or dangerous. For example, it has become a norm in high schools that students who have spotty attendance, have not done their homework, cannot keep track of books and papers, or do not put much effort into schoolwork are making a “choice” to not engage. When the interventions of teachers and administrators do not produce the desired results, the refrain is likely to be, “We can only do so much, he has to meet us halfway or it’s her choice” and we turn our attention to another student who may be more receptive to our ministrations. As Silva describes, working within this

norm of “choice”, by ascribing “choice” and the ideology of sameness to the individual, we fail to see and take into account socially produced differences that come out of poverty and social class (Silva, 2013, p. 99-101). When we ignore unequal social structures, we perpetuate the inequality. The discourses of equality of opportunity and self-reliance have relevance for rural working class students and educators in the 21st century. Research, theories and concepts surrounding educational leaders’ attempts to not succumb to normalizing practices (Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 1977; Badiou, 2001; Hoy, 2005; Gunzenhauser, 2007) are seen in philosophy, critical theory, sociology, and educational philosophy, but are not so commonly referenced in the educational leadership arena of theory, practical application and action. As well, educational leaders are not commonly taught to be aware of how the dominant discourses of the day might sometimes be in contradiction with school practices and policies or might be in contradiction with professional or ethical judgment.

The final section of the Literature Review moves back to the setting of this case study. While much has been described in the Background and Introduction, events that shaped the industrialization and deindustrialization of the community are outlined.

Livingston, Montana

Engine, engine, number nine
 Running on the Chicago Line
 See it sparkle, see it shine
 Engine, engine, number nine
Traditional Nursery Rhyme

In 1869, thirteen years before the City of Livingston was platted, railroads began daily passenger service from Omaha, Nebraska to Sacramento, California. Traveling by

wagon, a 2000-mile journey across the western United States took approximately four months. By passenger train, this 2000-mile journey took approximately four days. A wagon could travel approximately 17 miles in a day, but an engine could cover 18-22 miles in an hour. The railroad opened up travel across the western United States.

The epigraph that introduced the chapter was part of a collection of oral histories of women (Keffer, 1997) who worked for the railroad in Livingston, Montana. These interviews occurred in 1997, a little over a decade after the Burlington Northern pulled out of Livingston. While Livingston, Montana and Park High School are discussed in the Introduction and in the Context in the Methodology chapter, the following presents historical information about Livingston, Montana that is pertinent to understanding the setting and context of this study.

Written by this researcher for the Park High School website and paraphrased from the introduction of this study:

The city of Livingston is situated near the Great Bend of the Yellowstone River, where the river turns from flowing north to flowing east, 55 miles from the Northern entrance of Yellowstone Park. Surrounded by four mountain ranges, this area was traveled 11,000 years ago by the Clovis people, who entered the area by way of the Bering Land Bridge near the end of the last Ice Age. In his return trip from the Pacific in 1806, Captain William Clark, giving the first written account of the area in a Corp of Discovery journal entry, described it as the coming together of buffalo roads (Brekke, 2014). The Northern Pacific Railroad Company established Livingston in 1882. Today, Livingston is a small city of approximately 7,000 residents located in Park County (population 15,500). (Park High School website, n.d.)

Livingston is the county seat of Park County, Montana. Park County is comprised of six towns in its 2,814 square miles of mountains and valleys (Park County Atlas, 2013, p. 13). The highest point in Montana is in Park County (Granite Peak) and

the Yellowstone River, which is the longest undammed river in the lower 48 states runs through it.

There is a rich body of historical documents on Livingston, as residents sought to preserve the history and stories of the area. The following is a chronology of events that are significant to its history and is useful for understanding the setting and context of this ethnographic case study. (Keffer, 1998; Whithorn, 2011; Whithorn, 2013) Table 4 illustrates those events.

Table 4. Chronology of historical events, Livingston, Montana.

Year	Event
1882	Northern Pacific railroad plats Livingston town site
1894	Railroad Strike of 1894 – characterized contentious labor-management relations
1902	Northern Pacific Passenger Depot (now Livingston Depot) built – symbol of Livingston’s importance as the gateway to Yellowstone National Park and a railroad repair hub
1914-1918	World War I
1920	Railroad payroll reaches its peak in the United States
1939-1945	World War II
1950’s	At its peak, the railroad employed approximately 1000 in Livingston
1959	Northern Pacific’s Livingston accounting office moved to St. Paul, Minnesota
1970	Burlington Northern absorbs Northern Pacific Railway in merger
1979	Passenger service in Livingston ends – North Coast Hiawatha route, Amtrak
1981	Burlington Northern put Depot up for sale – met with fierce resistance by community
1985	Burlington Northern closes maintenance shops in Livingston; 350 were transferred or opted for a buy-out
1985	Burlington Northern donates Depot to the City of Livingston
1987	Burlington Northern leased its southern Montana main line (breaking up its former transcontinental tracks) to Washington Corporation (first Livingston Rebuild Center now Montana Rail Link)
Late 1980’s	Three of four sawmills in Livingston and Park County close
2002	Largest private employer in Livingston had fewer than 50 employees

Other historical situations provide a backdrop to this study. Between the late 1950’s and 1982, before the closure of the Livingston shops, Burlington Northern had

laid off 10,000 workers in the United States. (Keffer, 1998) The railroad also left in its wake an EPA Superfund site due to diesel and asbestos pollutants.

In his 2004 study of postindustrial urban-to-rural migration, Hines used Livingston, Montana as the field site. During the year he lived in Livingston, he interviewed about 300 residents, which included 200 newcomers about why they came to Livingston. Hines described the railroad influences apparent in the community, for example, the early century redbrick architecture in the downtown, which gives the town a feel of “solidity and dignity” (p. 203). Most of the two to three story brick buildings were built sometime between 1900 and 1920. In describing the feel of the town, he reflected, “The built environment of the town appears more substantial than its current population and production base would suppose” (p. 162). Hines also described the democratic nature of town politics, which, in his view, were reminiscent of the time of strong labor unions. He discussed that unlike many communities in the west, that between the years 1900-2000, Livingston maintained a population of 5500-6500, which he described as “remarkable stability for a western town” (Hines, p 158). “From 1970 to 2010, the population in Park County grew from 11,364 to 15,587, a 37% increase. From 2000 to 2011, the population grew by 160, a 2% increase” (Park County Atlas, 2013, p. 13)

According to the Park County Atlas (2013) which used data sources from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, 11.3% of residents in the county lived below poverty, while 7.6% of families were below poverty. This was below the Montana and U.S. average. During the same period, 2011, 41.1% of Park

County had household incomes above \$50,000 per year, while 58.9% had incomes below \$50,000 per year. In the U.S., 52.7% had annual incomes above \$50,000, while 47.3 had incomes below \$50,000 in the same period (p. 16). Per capita income and median income includes not only wages and salary, but also investment income, retirement income, etc., it is useful to look at “average earnings per job.” In Park County, average annual earnings per job in Park County were \$27,285 at the same time per capita income was \$36,690 (p. 14). In Park County in 2011, non-labor income in the form of money earned on investments (dividends, interest, and rent) was 58.5% (47.4% in the U.S.). Other forms of significant non-labor income came in the form of government payments to individuals, which includes retirement, disability and medical payments, such as Medicare and Medicaid (Park County Atlas, p. 24).

In examining employment trends by industry, between 1970 and 2000, jobs in the transportation and public utilities sector (which includes the railroad) shrunk from 1371 in 1980 to 356 in 2000. Service-related sectors, notably in accommodation and food services, healthcare, and arts, entertainment and recreation grew between 1970 and 2000 from 3,008 to 5,904, a 96% increase (Park County Atlas, p. 19). Also of note,

From 1970 to 2000, the three industry sectors that added the newest jobs were services (1,936 new jobs), retail trade (936 new jobs) and construction (578 new jobs). From 2001 to 2010, jobs in non-services related industries shrank from 2,064 to 1,857, a 10% decrease. Government jobs during this period dropped from 824 to 821. Meanwhile jobs in the services-related industries grew from 5,676 to 6,252. From 2001 to 2010, the three industry sectors that added the newest jobs were real estate, rental leasing, finance and insurance and other services. (Park County Atlas, 2013, p. 19)

In conclusion, while the population of Park County experienced an increase between 1970 and 2010, the largest employment increase was in service-related sectors.

Additionally, after the closure of the BN in 1985, an urban to rural in-migration to the area occurred and the population remained steady.

Summary

In this chapter a review of the literature and research that has informed this study has been described. Beginning with the influence of the national policy initiative of college and career on rural schools, a discussion of particular issues surrounding rurality and the transition from high school was followed by an examination of some of the school and non-school factors that are explored in this study. A definition and description of the dominant discourses of equality of opportunity and merit is discussed. Moving to the local level, a description of the site of the study is given in order to understand the historical context of this ethnographic case study. The following chapter describes the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methodology used in this ethnographic case study is detailed in this chapter. Organized chronologically, the rationale for the research design is discussed, followed by the context in which the research took place. As the primary instrument used for data collection was interviews, brief participant vignettes are provided. Secondary data collection instruments are described along with a discussion and example of the interactive nature of data collection and analysis in a case study. Finally, the data procedures used are discussed, followed by data validation and analysis strategies.

Research Design

This study is an attempt to understand how students from working class families made decisions about what to do with work or further education as they were transitioning from high school. The participants in this study all attended Park High School, and all but one had fathers who did not graduate from a four-year college. All participants graduated from Park High School and considered themselves to be average or above average students academically. The study focuses on an event that occurred in the rural community – that of gradual and then abrupt deindustrialization in 1985 as the Burlington Northern Railroad maintenance shops closed in Livingston, Montana, bringing over 300 layoffs. The study attempts to understand the factors that influenced

decision-making for students and attempts to look at similarities and differences between the two groups: those who left the high school in the decade following deindustrialization and those who recently graduated from high school. The research design chosen to study the research questions is that of an ethnographic case study. What follows is a discussion of the research design and plan of study.

Case Study

In her work on case study applications in the field of education, Merriam (1998) describes the case study from the perspective of several writers. “Becker (1968) defines the purposes of a case study as twofold, that is “to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study” and “to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process” (p. 233) (as cited in Merriam 1998, p. 29). Merriam differentiates the case study from other research designs in this way: “By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study focuses on holistic description and explanation” (p. 29). According to Cresswell, (2007) case study research is useful in studying an issue through “one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)” (p. 73). For Yin (1994), case study is a good approach when the topic under inquiry has clear boundaries and when an in-depth understanding of a case or case comparisons is needed by the researcher.

Ethnographic Case Study Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) view ethnographic research as a type of case study research (p. 44). According to Fetterman (1989), “The

ethnographer is interested in understanding a social and cultural scene from the emic, or insider's perspective. The ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist; the closer the readers of an ethnography come to understanding the native's point of view the better the story and the better the science" (p.12). Yin (1994) further explains that "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.23). The phenomena examined in this study are the school-based and non-school-based factors that influenced the transition from high school to career and work in a community that underwent deindustrialization. The two groups that make up the case are those students who attended Park High School who had primary guardians (usually fathers) who did not graduate from college. This case study is bounded by two time periods: the decade that immediately follows deindustrialization (1985-1995) and a generation later, the decade that distantly follows deindustrialization (2005-2015). While ethnographic techniques and case study techniques are similar, ethnography helped to shape this study as the cultural context of the school, the community at large, socioeconomic factors, and attitudes of parents and educators are important sociocultural considerations. As ethnography is descriptive in nature, "the ethnographer's task is the discovery and recording" of what participants "know about their world" (Campbell and Gregor, 2004, p. 87).

Merriam (1998) states that qualitative case studies are characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. A case study is particularistic as it "concentrates attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific

problems, taking a holistic view of the situation.” (Merriam, p. 29) This study is particularistic in that attempts to understand both the school and non-school-based factors that came into play as two generations of students from working class families made the transition from high school to college and work in a community that had been confronted with deindustrialization due to railroad layoffs.

A second feature is that a qualitative study should also be descriptive so that the “end product is a rich “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. “Thick description...means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated. Case studies include as many variables as possible.” (Merriam, p. 30) As well, taking into consideration Cresswell’s (2007) thoughts on transferability, in order to make possible comparisons to other contexts, thick descriptions in this study are provided in order to both understand and compare the factors that influenced the post-high school path, for example, how family structures and expectations, school experiences and assistance, community supports, and economic conditions changed or did not change after deindustrialization. As this study also seeks to understand in order to inform the educational institution, uncovering and understanding complex and sometimes an unarticulated web of social relations, thick descriptions are necessary in order to get beyond the institutional discourse (Smith, 2005).

The final feature Merriam (1998) discusses is that a qualitative case study is heuristic in that it can give insights into how situations develop over time and “previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge.” (p. 30) The ultimate applicability of this research is to assist the high school leadership team of this school and

perhaps other high schools in deindustrialized rural communities in both understanding and assisting students from working class backgrounds in making informed transitions from K-12 education to college, work, and career.

In summary, an ethnographic case study was the research design used in order to examine a specific situation in a specific place and context, show the complexities involved as students make the transition from high school to college, work and career, and to gain insight into how the passage of time affected their paths after high school graduation.

Research Context

This ethnographic case study took place in 2015 in the community of Livingston, Montana. Park High School alumni make up the participants in the study. Park High School is the largest public high school in Park County, Montana. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, n.d.) classifies Park High School with a grade span of 9-12, its locale is considered a remote town. The Montana Office of Public Instruction (Montana OPI, 2015) lists Park High School as one of 171 high schools in Montana. In 2014-2015, 48 Montana schools (6%) had enrollments of greater than 500 students, and 165 schools (20%) had enrollments of between 250 and 499. Park High School hovers at the 500-student mark. In 2014-2015, the enrollment count was 498, the graduation rate at 83.8%, the student/teacher ratio at 15:1 and 37.1% students qualified for free and reduced lunch although was closer to 50% in the Kindergarten through 8th grades. In the same year, 7% of Park High School students received special education services.

The interviews in this study occurred in a three-month period of time from September, 2015 to December, 2015. All interviews were digitally recorded. Pilot interviews were conducted with four participants during July and August, 2015. The interviews that were done in person took place in the researcher's office - the "principal's office" or in a nearby conference room at Park High School. Where to conduct the interviews was a dilemma, as the researcher was aware of her position as principal of the school and was concerned that participants would feel they could not talk freely. The researcher asked the participants where they would like to meet, and she offered up the school as one option. As a resident of the community for some years, the researcher was aware that her role as the principal of the school was how members of the community primarily identified her. Whether at the grocery store, at community events, while working in her yard at home, or at the doctor's office, she would usually be asked how things were faring at the high school. So, while most participants seemed anxious at the start of the interview, there was an ease that the researcher believes is attributable to people feeling more comfortable talking to the high school principal in their community versus talking with a graduate student working on her dissertation.

While described in data procedures used below, the later interviews were done via telephone and digitally recorded at the researcher's home. This was necessary to both capture the experiences of those whose families left Livingston due to being transferred to Burlington, Iowa and Glendive, Montana after the final layoffs by Burlington Northern in 1985, as well as accommodate situations of those who lived elsewhere and could not come to Livingston. One participant who lived in Livingston agreed to the interview if it

was done over the phone due to personal reasons. While at first concerned that phone interviews might feel stilted because body language would not be read, these interviews, in fact, flowed fairly easily.

Participants

The participants for the study were from two groups. The first group was comprised of those men and women who attended Park High School in Livingston, Montana, and graduated or would have graduated between the years of 1985-1995, the decade immediately following the closing of the Burlington-Northern Railroad. This time period is referred to as “immediately after deindustrialization.” This time period was selected because the ability to work for the railroad and earn a middle-class income ceased to be an option in Livingston. Even though Montana Rail Link came into Livingston in 1987 and revived some railroad jobs, the pay was not what it had been. In a discussion with a Park High Class of 1975 graduate, he described being laid off by Burlington Northern in 1982 after being there for 7 years. When he left he was earning a wage of \$13 per hour. In 1987, five years later, he was hired by Montana Rail Link in the same machinist position he had held with Burlington Northern, earning a wage of \$11 per hour.

The second group was comprised of those men and women who attended Park High School and graduated, or would have graduated between the years of 2005-2015, the most recent decade. This group was selected because a generation had passed since

deindustrialization occurred. This time period is referred to as “distantly after deindustrialization.”

While the graduation year was a criterion for participants interviewed, another criteria was that of the primary guardian, usually the father, not having completed a four-year college. The strategy used for sampling is that of purposeful sampling. Merriam (1998) explains that in purposeful sampling, the goal is to select participants that can help the researcher understand more about the situation. As well, this study sought participants so that cases could be “information-rich” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The type of purposeful sampling changed as the study progressed. While a snowball sampling strategy was used at the start of the interviews, with teachers, parents, and community members provided contact information to the researcher, as the study progressed, maximum variation sampling was used in order to get a wide range of graduation years within each generational group, and to achieve a gender balance. The first participants interviewed were those who stayed or returned to the community after graduating from high school. A few graduated from a four-year college, but were unable to work in their trained fields due to lack of work in the community, or they were piecing together a myriad of jobs to make a living. This led the researcher to be on the lookout for students who had not gone past high school and those who attended technical schools. During the second half of the interview process, the experiences of those who were directly affected by the closing of the railroad had not been heard, so the researcher put out a posting on Facebook. This posting was shared by a colleague with a group called “*This is Really Livingston*,” which was composed of over 6500 people who “followed” the page. The

researcher sent a written message, asking to join the group and was allowed in and was able to interact with others. Fifteen former students responded. After corresponding privately through Facebook Messenger to each who had responded, four met the criteria established and agreed to become participants in the study.

The sampling strategy of maximum variation was useful in this study and is one that Merriam (1998) refers to “even a small sample of great diversity yields important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (p. 63). As the study ultimately seeks to understand how students from working class families navigate obstacles and opportunities as they made the transition from high school to college or work in order to better inform a public high school, having diversity within the small sample made for information-rich cases.

Pilot Study Participants

Of note are those who participated in a pilot study. A maximum variation sampling strategy was used in order to ascertain the time frames to be studied. During the pilot study interviews, the set of questions were broader and more open-ended. Piloting the questions resulted in improved clarity of the questions in the interview protocol and helped to determine the length of the interviews (from two to three hours to 45-90 minutes). As well the pilot study resulted in a more informed decision about the time frames that would be studied. From the pilot to the final study, questions that focused on the transition from high school to career and work were honed so as to be more specific and direct. The interview questions became better aligned to allow the researcher both to

identify the factors that influenced the transition from high school, and, importantly, to understand how the factors identified by the participants were operationalized.

Four individuals were interviewed for the pilot study. These participants are identified by a letter of the alphabet, starting with the order in which they were interviewed.

Table 5. Pilot study participants.

Pseudonym	Graduating Class	Gender
A	1976	F
B	1969	M
C	1999	M
D	1995 (dropped out)	M

Participant D falls within the time frame under study. D attained a high school equivalency diploma (GED) in 2001 after dropping out of Park High School twice during his ninth and tenth grade years. As a young man, D's single mother worked for the railroad. Adding to what he described as a chaotic childhood, D believes he was the cause of an accidental death of a community member after he entered high school. He now works in the trades in community.

In the pilot study, participant A, who graduated in 1976, is a friend and colleague of the researcher. Born and raised in Livingston, A now teaches at Park High School. Her father worked a variety of non-professional jobs as she grew up.

Participants B and C were father and son, with B graduating from Park High School in 1969, and C in 1999. These participants were interviewed together and provided useful information on the history of the town. Participant B joined a family business in town, while C works a non-professional job in the medical field.

Data Collection

While interviewing was the primary strategy used to collect data, observation and artifact analysis was an inextricable part of the process. Merriam (1998), in citing Patton's work (1990), describe that in case study research, "Multiple sources of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective...By using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings" (p. 244).

Observation

As the researcher is the high school principal at the time of the study; observations consisted of informal and formal conversations and field notes. Informal conversations came about in my role as an educational leader and were jotted down in a notebook, organized chronologically, that consists of my daily work and discussions. Talks with parents, students, staff, colleagues, representatives of youth-serving agencies, and community members helped to inform emergent findings and helped to shape the questions explored in this study. Formal conversations are those that came out of various focus groups held with students, parents, educators, youth serving agencies, and community members. While the majority of these formal conversations occurred before

the study began and were an attempt to understand the various factors that affected student engagement in high school and the transition from high school, the themes that emerged helped to support or refute emergent findings. Notes of these formal conversations had been compiled and utilized in the ongoing work of high school restructuring. Finally, field notes were taken during and after interviews.

Artifact Analysis

Artifact analysis was a second data collection strategy used in this study. Local historical records about Livingston, the gradual and then abrupt layoffs of railroad workers over time both informed the literature review and helped to clarify and contextualize information coming from the interviews. Recent public information in the form of the National Student Clearinghouse and Montana University System records that give a clearer picture regarding numbers of students who go to college, student preparedness for college informs this study. Yin (1994) believes that an essential skill in a case study is for the researcher to be able to collect and analyze data at the same time. At a number of points in this study, artifact analyses were used to cross-check and understand emergent findings.

Interviews

As interviews were the primary instrument used to collect data, the focus of this section is on how the interview protocol was developed as well as relevant information regarding procedures and interview guidelines. Interviews for this study consisted of both face-to-face in-depth interviews and telephone interviews. The purpose of the interview was to not simply collect information about and describe the informant's

experiences about growing up and transitioning from high school to adulthood, but was to attempt to “explicate” the social relations amongst the informant, the institution of K-12 education, and the social networks of support at work in the community, which may not be visible and articulated (DeVault, M. and McCoy, L (2002); Campell & Gregor, 2004).

Each interview took approximately 45–90 minutes. Follow-up clarifications occurred by phone, in person, and by e-mail. The follow-up conversations tended to occur after the transcribed interview was sent to the participant with an invitation to clarify, add or make corrections. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed.

The interview questions for this study were initially drawn from the work of Jennifer Silva (2013), in telephone consultation and e-mail correspondence beginning in March, 2015, in her in *Coming Up Short: Working Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* and in her work with Robert Putnam in *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (2015). Dr. Silva shared the interview questions and protocol she had been using in her work in the eastern United States. This researcher then edited, deleted, and added questions to suit the needs of this study. As well, interview questions were drawn from Lois Weis’s ethnography *Working Class Without Work: High School Students in a De-industrializing Economy* (1990).

To narrow the focus of the study, the researcher created a Table of Specifications.

Tables of Specifications

Table 6. Research question 1, Interview protocol A. immediately after the deindustrialization of a rural community

Research sub-questions:	
What were the factors from outside the school that influenced the path from high school to college and work?	How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work?
Interview Questions	
1A. What did your parents do for a living – before the big railroad cutbacks of 1984 and after 1984?	
2A Did your parents expect for you do homework or make certain grades when you were in high school?	
3A. When you were in high school, what did you with your time outside of school (jobs, activities) – after school, weekends, summers?	1B. Did the cutbacks at the railroad affect your transition from high school? <i>If yes, how?</i>
4A. When you were growing up, did you go to Sunday school or community activities like 4-H or Scouts? <i>If yes, what activities?</i>	2B. How did they convey that to you? 2C. Did your parents have an expectation of how far you would go in your education?
5A. When you were in high school, did you want to live in this community or come back to this community when you were an adult?	3B. Did how you spent your time outside of school (activities, jobs) influence your post-high school path?
6A. Can you remember times when your parents seemed to struggle economically – when they couldn't pay the bills or worried about money?	4B. Do you remember any mentors you talked with about what you might do after high school? Describe.
Research sub-questions:	
What were the school-based factors that influenced the path from high school to college and work?	How did those school-based factors influence the path from high school to college and work?
Interview questions:	
7A. Can you remember how you felt about/viewed yourself as a high school student? <i>Probe: capable/not capable of being successful in school; engaged/unengaged student</i>	7B. In retrospect, did your view of yourself as a student influence your path from high school? Please explain. 7C. Has that view changed over the years? How so?

Table 6. Research question 1, interview protocol A. Immediately after the deindustrialization of a rural community, continued.

8A. When you think of a teacher in high school who had a positive influence on you, what did he/she value in a student? <i>Probe for non-cognitive readiness skills, ex., persistence, creativity, problem solving, etc.</i>	8B. In thinking back, did this teacher influence your post-high school path? <i>If yes, how so?</i>
9A. Was college, careers and work after high school talked about in your classes at school?	9B. <i>If yes, how was it talked about? Was this helpful to you?</i>
10A. When you began to think about what you wanted to be when you grew up, what did you do to get more information or a feel for what this work/career field might be like?	10B. Were there career exploration/apprenticeship or job shadowing opportunities in high school? Did you utilize any of these? <i>Explain.</i>
11A. Do you remember talking with guidance counselors or teachers about your choices after high school? <i>Probe: who, in what format,</i>	11B. How did this influence your decision-making regarding your path after high school? 11C. <i>If college or post-high training was discussed, how did you figure out how you would finance your education or training? Probe: did school assist, to what degree?</i>
12A. If you had a change to do high school over again, is there anything you would have wanted the school do to differently?	12B. In looking back, how could the school have been more of a help as you made the transition from high school?

Table 7. Research question 2 – Interview protocol B, in the 20-30 years (distantly after) following the deindustrialization of a rural community.

Research sub-questions:	
What were the factors from outside the school that influenced the path from high school to college and work?	How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work?
Interview questions:	
1A. What do your parents do for a living? 1C. The railroad once provided a good many more jobs in the community then it does now. Did the “railroad town” history have an effect on the decisions you made or the choices you felt you had as you were leaving high school?	1B. Has what they do for a living had an influence on what you’ve done in choosing your future education or work? <i>If yes, how so?</i> 1D. <i>If yes, how so?</i>

Table 7. Research question 2 – Interview protocol B, in the 20-30 years (distantly after) following the deindustrialization of a rural community, continued.

2A. Did your parents expect for you do homework or make certain grades when you were in high school?	2B. How did they convey that to you? 2C. Did your parents have an expectation how far you would go in your education?
3A. When you were in high school, what did you with your time outside of school (jobs, activities) – after school, weekends, summers?	3B. Did how you spent your time outside of school (activities, jobs) influence your post-high school path?
4A. When you were growing up, did you go to Sunday school or community activities like 4-H or Scouts? <i>If yes, what activities?</i>	4B. Do you remember any mentors you talked with about what you might do after high school? Describe.
5A. When you were in high school, did you want to live in this community or come back to this community when you were an adult?	5B. How did this influence the decisions you made when you graduated from high school?
6A. Can you remember times when your parents seemed to struggle economically – when they couldn't pay the bills or worried about money?	6A. How did you think about this? 6B. Did your family's economic situation have an effect on your path to college, career or work?
Research sub-questions:	
What were the school-based factors that influenced the path from high school to college and work?	How did those school-based factors influence the path from high school to college and work?
Interview questions:	
7A. Can you remember how you felt about/viewed yourself as a high school student? <i>Probe: capable/not capable of being successful in school; engaged/unengaged student</i>	7B. In retrospect, did your view of yourself as a student influence your path from high school? Please explain. 7C. Has that view changed over the years? How so?
8A. When you think of a teacher in high school who had a positive influence on you, what did he/she value in a student? <i>Probe for non-cognitive readiness skills, ex., persistence, creativity, problem solving, etc.</i>	8B. In thinking back, did this teacher influence your post-high school path? <i>If yes, how so?</i>
9A. Was college, careers and work after high school talked about in your classes at school?	9B. <i>If yes, how was it talked about? Was this helpful to you?</i>
10A. When you began to think about what you wanted to be when you grew up, what did you do to get more information or a feel for what this work/career field might be like?	10B. Were there career exploration/apprenticeship or job shadowing opportunities in high school? Did you utilize any of these? <i>Explain.</i>

Table 7. Research question 2 – Interview protocol B, in the 20-30 years (distantly after) following the deindustrialization of a rural community, continued.

11A. Do you remember talking with guidance counselors or teachers about your choices after high school? <i>Probe: who, in what format,</i>	11B. How did this influence your decision-making regarding your path after high school? 11C. <i>If college or post-high training was discussed, how did you figure out how you would finance your education or training?</i>
12A. If you had a change to do high school over again, is there anything you would have wanted the school do to differently?	12B. In looking back, how could the school have been more of a help as you made the transition from high school?

The next section details the interview procedures used in this study. In summary, while interviewing was the primary instrument of data collection, observations and artifact analysis were also utilized.

Data Procedures Used

In this ethnographic case study, the primary instrument of data collection was that of interviews. This section describes the procedures used in carrying out the research design. How participants were chosen and a general description of the interview process is described above. All in-person interviews were held at the high school in the researcher's office, the "principal's office," with the exception of one interview that was held in a conference room near the office. In preparation for the interview, blinds were pulled down for privacy, a digital audio recorder, two copies of the consent form, and a clipboard with the interview protocol were on a coffee table in the researcher's office. The researcher and participant sat across from each other. The researcher watched for the arrival of each participant in order to minimize the daily distractions in the main office of

a bustling high school. While the researcher held some interviews during after school hours or on weekends, most participants found an early morning time before work to be best. After the participant was offered a beverage and escorted into the researcher's office, small talk about topics such as the physical changes in the high school, as a major renovation had occurred three years prior, questions about the furnishings in the researcher's office (such as an old roll top desk the researcher had salvaged from one of the elementary schools), and participant comments about whether or not they had ever spent time in the principal's office helped to ease awkwardness. During phone interviews, the researcher was in a quiet space in her home, with the audio recorder, consent form and interview questions. The researcher then gave an introduction to the study, flexibly worded as:

I'm doing a study on what it's been like to go to grow up, go to school and begin the transition to adulthood. I'm interested in how going to school has changed from around the time the Burlington Northern pulled out to the current generation. I'm going to ask you questions about growing up, your high school years and how you moved on in your life from high school.

The researcher then discussed the details of the consent form (Appendix), had the consent form signed and helped the participant attach the microphone onto their person. For those who had telephone interviews, the researcher offered to send a copy of the consent form by e-mail or had previously sent the consent form after the participant agreed to the interview. In order to ease into the interview, questions began with factual sociodemographic information, such as birthplace, educational attainment, age, schools attended, and so on.

As described in the Table of Specifications, Tables 6 and 7, two forms of the interview protocol were used, Interview Protocol A and Interview Protocol B (Appendix). Protocol A was used with participants who attended high school immediately after the deindustrialization of a rural community (1985-1995) and Protocol B was used with participants who attended high school distantly after the deindustrialization of a rural community (2005-2015). The only difference in the two interview protocols had to do with reference to the effects of the Burlington Northern closure. For those who attended high school immediately after deindustrialization, the two questions asked were:

1A. What did your parents do for a living – before the big railroad cutbacks of 1984 and after 1984?

1B. Did the cutbacks in the railroad affect your transition from high school? If yes, how?

For those who attended high school distantly after deindustrialization, the three questions that referred to the Burlington Northern closure were:

1A. What do your parents do for a living?

1B. Has what they do for a living had an influence on what you've done in choosing your future education or work? If yes, how so?

1C. The railroad once provided a good many more jobs in the community than it does now. Did Livingston's "railroad town" history have an effect on the decisions you made or the choices you felt you had as you were leaving high school? If yes, how so?

While interview questions were standardized, in the actual interviews, flexible wording was used and the order of the questions was sometimes varied, with the researcher responding to the participant's train of thought. For example, in the interview guide, questions were formatted to first explore family and community supports. In the second half of the interview guide, questions were geared toward school supports that influenced the transition from high school. Sometimes participants interwove school, community and family supports as they told their story. So as to allow for new insights and connections, the researcher allowed for this flexibility.

The interviews were semi-structured, always addressing the interview questions, but allowed for new information to come forth. Probes were used to pursue relevant lines of questioning. This was done with the researcher saying, "You talked about... do you have more to add on this?" For example, as Pecos Bill discussed his graduation from trade school, he talked about various options of work and various employers he considered pursuing. As he was currently working on a farm, not utilizing his training, as a probe, the researcher asked him to more fully describe those various options, in an attempt to understand why he had not taken these routes. This probe revealed important information about rurality, staying close to home, and a precarious labor market.

In addition to use of a digital audio recorder, during interviews the researcher took notes during and after interviews, wrote observations and perceptions, and noted items to pursue or verify. Artifact analysis and the use of various documents took a recursive form during the interview process. For example, a participant's discussion of his father's history of work with Montana Rail Link led the researcher to verify information on a

related topic through e-mail correspondence with the company. As well, information such as public records in the form of Department of Education, U.S. Census information and non-confidential school records were utilized.

At the end of each interview, after the researcher asked if there was anything the participant wanted to add, the recorder was turned off. At this point, the researcher reiterated that as this was a small study and the anonymity of participants would be preserved, would he or she like to give a pseudonym through which to be identified. This served to be an effective transition topic and helped to ease the researcher and participant out of the interview process. Alternatively, at times, rich information emerged after the recorder was turned off. The researcher attempted to record the gist of this information and transferred this to the transcribed interviews for coding purposes.

Participants were also asked if they would be willing to receive a copy of the transcribed interview to review for accuracy and to make changes. Member checking is considered to be critical for establishing credibility and is an important validation strategy in qualitative research (Cresswell, 2007, p. 207-208). While most participants were willing to do so and gave their e-mail or physical mailing address, a few stated they had no need to review. All participants were willing to participate in follow-up interviews if needed. The researcher then sent the interviews to a transcriptionist. After transcribing, the researcher reviewed each interview and merged handwritten notes with the transcription. The record of the interview was then sent to the participant. All participant materials – interview notes, field notes, and the transcribed interview were stored in

confidential files and identified by the participant's pseudonym. The following section describes the strategies used to reduce and analyze the data.

Data Analysis Strategies

As described above, data analysis and data collection occurred simultaneously in this study. Reflections, hunches, ideas, notes, and tentative themes led the researcher to test or explore these in the next interview or the next conversation with a student, alumnus, community member or fellow educator. As an insider immersed in the work of preparing high school students for adulthood, and as a principal engaged with her staff in the process of internal high school redesign, this project benefitted from ongoing analysis. The researcher made the decision to end interviews as thematic category constructions began to be saturated.

After interviews were completed, the first step in coding the data was to merge field notes related to the interviews with the transcripts. This was done to remind the researcher of observations, hunches, rich conversation that occurred after the audio recorder was turned off and emerging themes. The second step was to reread each group of interviews in their entirety – those immediately after deindustrialization and those distantly after deindustrialization to both reduce the data into units and to begin to develop category constructions. A participant table was constructed of demographic data units for ease of participant differentiation and identification. The third step was to reread, group and code the interviews by (mostly) question order from both groups in order to further look for patterns. This was done by literally photocopying, then cutting up and grouping questions in order using a variety of highlighting colors to differentiate

between generation groups and to note units of data. According to Merriam (1998), a unit of data “is any meaningful (or potentially meaningful) segment of data...a unit of data can be as small as a word a participant uses to describe a feeling or phenomenon, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident (p. 179). In this step, the data was reduced into units and then category constructions. As Merriam (1998) instructs, “Categories should reflect the purpose of the research. In effect, categories are the answers to your research question(s)” (p. 183). The school-based and non-school based factors that emerged are categories that emerged from the coded data. These factors, on the surface, answered the research questions. Utilizing Luker’s advice (2008), notes were kept of hunches and patterns that began emerge (p. 200). “Moving back forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (Merriam, 1998 p. 178), four factors or categories that emerged were then grouped into themes for each generational group. Cresswell (2007) describes the process of data analysis and representation as the “data analysis spiral” (p. 151) as the researcher moves from data collection to management and then reading and taking notes into the spiral to the classifying, describing, and interpreting loop. The fifth step in this research spiral was to test the categories and themes with another rereading of the interviews, pulling out relevant descriptions, as well as what was not said – for example, the disruptions and contradictions in the narrative. Two readers who were longtime residents of the community were asked to read the interviews and give their thoughts to the researcher. A third reader, who knew the community well, was asked to read the results and give his

thoughts. The themes that emerged were both unique for each generational group (with the exception of one theme), and left very few units of data unassignable (Merriam, 1998, p. 185).

Data Validation

Research results are trustworthy “to the extent that there has been some accounting for their validity and reliability” (Merriam, 1998, p. 198). In discussing issues of validity, reliability, and ethics in case study research methods applied to the field of education, Merriam (1998) points to Guba’s strategies for answering the questions in a case study – “were the interviews reliably and validity constructed; was the content of the documents properly analyzed; do the conclusions of the case study rest upon data?” (p. 199) and was the research conducted in an ethical manner. This section will discuss issues of dependability (reliability) and validity in this ethnographic case study.

Internal Validity

Internal validity attempts to get at whether or not the findings match the reality of situation, as data do not interpret themselves, but are interpreted by the researcher. Strategies that have been used to strengthen internal validity include the following. (Gay, 2009; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Cresswell, 2007). The researcher has lived in the community for a long period of time and has been informally and formally collecting data in her role as high school principal on this topic. The researcher worked to make sure that the participants interviewed reflect a representative cross-section of students and that these Park High School alumni reflect the reality of the situation. As well, the researcher

has been involved in long-term informal observation for the past four years as she has watched and talked with students and families about the various factors that come into play as students transition from high school in the community under study.

Another strategy for enhancing internal validity is in how categories are determined. In keeping with recommended practice in both case study and ethnographic research, the categories by which the data are represented are *in vivo* codes, rather than *a priori* codes. (Cresswell, 2007) This has been done so as not to limit the analysis and to help ensure that the views of the participants are accurately represented.

A third strategy has been to reveal the researcher's positionality. In this study, the researcher has long-term involvement with the institution of public education in Montana, is the principal of the local high school, and at the start of the study, has been a resident of the community for twelve years. In order to clarify researcher bias, comments on past experiences, biases, and attitudes have been articulated as needed.

A fourth strategy to strengthen internal validity is the use of educational and non-educational colleagues to give feedback on questions, read interviews, comment on emergent themes and review the researcher's findings. As well, discussions with others knowledgeable about the school and community ensued throughout the study. As well, all participants who were agreeable were sent copies of their interviews to review for accuracy.

Dependability

Strategies used to help ensure that given the data, the results make sense are referred to as dependability (also referred to as consistency, reliability or stability) of the

results (Gay, 2009). The researcher's position in relation to the situation being studied has been revealed. As well, while interviewing was the primary instrument used to collect data, both artifact analysis and observation were also utilized. As well, triangulation was also used in an ongoing fashion during the study in order to analyze emergent findings. Finally, a written description of the processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation has been detailed in this methodology section in an attempt to provide an audit trail (Merriam, 1998).

Summary

In this chapter, the research methodology used in this study has been described. The rationale for the research design of an ethnographic case study was followed by the context for the research. The choosing of participants and participant vignettes are outlined. The instruments used for data collection and the procedures used were detailed. How the data was analyzed and interpreted is followed by strategies used to ensure trustworthiness through the internal validity and dependability of the results. The next chapter presents the results of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the themes that emerged from the interview data in order to identify and understand the factors that influenced students' paths from high school to college and work for two groups: students who graduated high school in the decade following the closure of the Burlington-Northern railroad (1985-1995) and the students who graduated from high school in the past ten years (2005-2015), a generation later. In the results, four key factors are identified: (1) Parent Expectations, (2) Financial Stability, (3) Community Networks and Resources, (4) Community and School Involvement and Social Networks. While there is interplay between the factors, they differ in importance between the two groups, with financial stability being paramount in how the 2005-2015 group makes the transition from high school.

This chapter is organized first by a discussion of the four factors and the components that comprise the factors, along with the similarities and differences between the two generations of students. The chapter then answers the research questions through the themes that emerged within the factors.

The Participants

The tables below introduce the participants and provide background information relevant to this study. A brief description of each participant follows. Participants were asked to identify themselves by a pseudonym.

Table 8. Participants “Immediately Following Deindustrialization”.

Pseudonym	Graduating Class	Gender	Educational Attainment	Years of Attendance in Local Schools	Father’s Work	Mother’s Work
Michelle	1985	F	Bachelors	K-12	Railroad	Teacher
Patience	1985	F	Masters	K-12	Railroad	Clerical
Jim	1986	M	Bachelors	K-12	Railroad	Clerical
Sally	1987	F	Bachelors	K-12	Automotive	School Support
Todd	1989	M	Bachelors + 1 yr. graduate school	K-12	Builder	School Support
Robin	1990	F	3 yrs. College	K-12	Trades, then Railroad	Teacher
Radar	1993	M	Bachelors	8-12	Retired Firefighter	Homemaker
Wyatt	1993	M	Bachelors	K-12	Rancher	Teacher

Table 9. Participants “distantly following deindustrialization”.

Pseudonym	Graduating Class	Gender	Educational Attainment	Years of Attendance in Local Schools	Father’s Work	Mother’s Work
Constance	2008	F	High School	K-12	Automotive	Medical Support
Callie	2009	F	2 yrs. Online College	3-12	Business Owner	Business Owner
Dominic	2010	M	Bachelors	K-12	Railroad	School Support

Table 9. Participants “distantly following deindustrialization”, continued

Pecos Bill	2013	M	Associates (2 yr.)	K-2 5-12	Mechanic	Grocery Clerk
Kristen	2013	F	2 yrs. College	6-12	Retired Military	Hotel
Seth	2014	M	High School	3-12	Constructio n	NA

Participants Immediately
Following Deindustrialization

Michelle graduated from Park High School in 1985. She came to Livingston as a young girl. At the time of the study, she was 48 years old. Her father worked for the Burlington Northern Railroad in the trades and her mother was a teacher. Her father accepted a transfer and the family moved to Burlington, Iowa. Michelle took a year off to finance college and take advantage of a school opportunity for travel and then went on to earn a B.A. in Business at a university in the northwest. She is employed as a professional in a Pacific Northwest.

Patience graduated from Park High School in 1985. She was born and raised in Livingston. At the time of the study she was 48 years old. She attended the Catholic school in Livingston and then attended Park High. Her father was employed in the trades at the Burlington Northern Railroad and accepted a transfer within Montana when railroad closed. Patience had a circuitous route through her post-secondary education, first attending a community college in Montana, then achieving a Bachelors, followed by a Master’s degree in the areas of criminal justice, sociology and counseling. She

currently is employed in Montana in a professional position somewhat related to her field of study.

Jim graduated from Park High School in 1986. He is the husband of Michelle. Jim was born and raised in Livingston. At the time of the study he was 48 years old. His father (and grandfather) worked for the Burlington Northern in the trades. His father accepted a transfer to Burlington, Iowa in January, 1986. Jim's mother was an assistant to a Montana university officer. His mother followed his father to Burlington after Jim graduated from Park High School in the spring of 1986. Jim went directly from high school to a four-year college in the Pacific Northwest where he graduated with a B.S. in Computer Science. He is employed professionally in this field in a Pacific Northwest city.

Sally graduated from Park High School in 1987. She was born and raised in Livingston. Her father worked managed a store and her mother was a medical assistant. At the time of the study Sally was 46. Sally began her post-secondary education at the University of Montana, but transferred to Montana State University to be closer to home after two years. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree. She has performed administrative assistance work, but is now employed in her field professionally in Livingston.

Todd graduated from Park High School in 1989. At the time of the study he was 44 years old. Todd moved to Livingston when he was six months old from the midwest when his parents joined his grandparents who operated a business in the area. Todd's father was a self-employed contractor. Todd went on to get a Bachelor's degree and had

a year of post-graduate work as he attempted to get a teaching endorsement. Abandoning the attempt due to the time commitment and the need to financially support his family, Todd joined the family business and then entered a related field of work.

Robin graduated from Park High in 1990. At the time of the study she was 43 years old. Born in Livingston, Robin attended K-6 at a small independent public school in the Paradise Valley. Her father died when she was a young girl. Her mother then went back to college to earn a teaching degree, although she did not use that degree. Her mother remarried a man who worked in the trades. Robin graduated from high school to attend three years of college. She returned to Livingston, married, and home-schooled her children. She works non-professional jobs.

Wyatt graduated from Park High School in 1993. At the time of the study he was 40 years old. Born in the Midwest, his mother, a teacher, was the first to graduate from college in her family. Moving to Livingston in 1978, his mother married a man who worked and owned the family ranch. Wyatt remembers that his mother stopped teaching during the years the Burlington Northern, left the area, but then returned to teaching in the area. Wyatt went on to get a B.S. from Montana State University. He works for the federal government in a professional position unrelated to his degree. This position was an outgrowth of work he had done during summers when he was going to college.

Radar graduated from Park High School in 1993. At the time of the study he was 40 years old. Radar grew up in a western city and his family vacationed in Montana. When his father retired from his work as a civil servant in the west, he moved the family to Livingston during Radar's middle school years. After high school, Ryan went on to

attain a Bachelor's degree in engineering from Montana State University. Working in a semi-professional related field for several years, Radar is now a CEO in a start-up company he founded. He continues to live in Park County and his company is located in Bozeman.

Participants Distantly Following Deindustrialization

Constance graduated from Park High School in 2008. At the time of the study, she was 25 years old. Constance was born and raised in Livingston. When she was growing up, her father worked in an automotive field in Livingston and her mother worked on and off as a medical assistant. Constance had good grades, planned to go to college, and was accepted into three universities in state and out-of-state. In the second semester of her senior year, she decided to not go college. She graduated from high school and married, moving with her husband out-of-state. She and her husband own and run a business.

Callie graduated from Park High School in 2009. At the time of the study, she was 24 years old. Born in the northwest, she and her family moved to Livingston when she was eight years old in 1999. Her parents visited the area, looking for a smaller place to relocate to in Montana. They visited Livingston, found a local business for sale and purchased it. After high school, Callie attended an online school, first full-time and then part-time. Callie abandoned online college after giving birth to a baby with serious medical challenges. She is the primary caretaker of her child and her education is on hold.

Dominic graduated from Park High School in 2010. At the time of the study he was 24 years old. Dominic lived in Livingston all his life. His father recently retired from Montana Rail Link, having worked for the railroad about 40 years since high school, despite times of layoffs throughout the years. His mother works in a food service position. After high school, Dominic graduated with Bachelors' degrees in two areas from a university in Europe, returning to Montana State University to study when the cost of living abroad was too difficult. At the time of the study, he was attempting to return to Europe for a Master's degree, and was working a variety of jobs to earn a living.

Kristin graduated from Park High School in 2013. At the time of the study she was 20 years old. Kristin's father grew up in Livingston and left when he joined the military. Upon his retirement in 2008, he returned to Livingston where he continues to work. Kristin's mother works in food service. After high school, Kristen attended Montana State University for two years and decided that the field she was pursuing was not for her. She left after her sophomore year. She is now working full-time in Bozeman and is pursuing an online training to become a veterinary technician.

Pecos Bill graduated from Park High School in 2013. At the time of the study he was 20 years old. Pecos Bill's father works in the trades in Livingston. His mother works at a grocery store. Pecos Bill grew up in Livingston. Pecos Bill intended to go into the military, but was disqualified due to medical reasons. Instead he completed a two-year program at a college of technology in Montana, attaining an Associate's Degree. Although he has found jobs in his field in North Dakota, Eastern Montana and Wyoming, it is a priority for Pecos to stay in southwest Montana. He currently works

year-round at a farm, where he gets room and board, is a handyman, and works on farm machinery.

Seth graduated from Park High School in 2014. At the time of the study he was 19 years old. Seth moved to Livingston with his father from a western city when he was in the third grade. Seth has not had much communication with his mother over the years. This researcher had met Seth's father and mistakenly made the assumption that he had not completed college. In the interview, Seth revealed that his father had, in fact, completed college, but has been in construction all his life. Seth was kept as a participant in this study because his experience as he made the transition from high school is useful data. At the time of the study, Seth, who has worked a variety of jobs related to ranching, was unemployed, and planned to join his father in construction work after hunting season ended.

Results

Results are organized in the following way in the presentation of the findings of this study. In the data analysis, interviews were reduced into units of data. These like units of data came together to form categories. In this study, the term "category" is used synonymously with "factor." The school and non-school based "factors" answer the research questions. The themes that emerged are to be thought of as how the factors (or categories) operate. To give an example of this, the second non-school based factor reported in the results that influenced the transition from high school is referred to as "Financial Stability." The units of data that comprise this factor (or category) are those having to do with financing college, financial stress in the family, the influence of

parents' work, and the railroad. The themes that emerge are *College as an investment* for the 1985-1995 group and *College is a gamble* for the 2005-2015 group. These two themes operate differently in each generational group¹³.

The results begin with the first factor, Parent Expectations. This factor is comprised of expectations for homework and grades and parental hopes of educational attainment for their children.

Factor One: Parent Expectations

I can remember my Dad kind of pushing me to go to college, so that I didn't have to work like he did all the time...he wanted me to go on and do great things I guess, you know – do something besides beat up your body. (Todd, Class of 1989)

My dad says, 'It's up to you, what you want to do. Once you're committed, follow through.' He said, 'If you go to college, you'd better finish it, or that's a lot of money you just wasted.' (Pecos Bill, Class of 2013)

Homework and Grades

In the interviews, the researcher asked questions that attempted to understand parental expectations of the participants regarding homework, grades and level of educational attainment they hoped for their child after high school. Table 10 summarizes this information.

¹³ See Tables 18-22 in Chapter Five for tables that summarize and illustrate this alignment.

Table 10. Parent Expectations for Grades and Homework Completion.

Generational Groups	n	Parents Conveyed Expectations for Grades and Homework	Parents Did Not Convey Expectations for Grades and Homework	Parents Incentivized Getting High Grades
1985-1995	8	7	1	2
2005-2015	6	5	1	1

In both groups, twelve of the fourteen participants experienced either spoken or unspoken expectations that homework should be done and grades should be either at an average or above average level. In the 1985-1995 group, Sally spoke of her parents expecting her to get a 'C' or above. "If I didn't have a 'C' or above, privileges would be taken away." Of all the participants in the study, the highest degree attained was a Master's degree by Patience, although she does not work in the field in which she trained.

I was not an 'A' student. I struggled. I struggled hard all the way through school. I studied for every single grade I got. When I graduated high school I had a 'C' average. Their only expectation of me was to study hard and to do the very best I could. (Patience, Class of 1985)

Three of the fourteen participants said that their parents incentivized their getting good grades. Todd described that his parents pushed him to be on the honor roll, helped him with his homework, and sweetened the pot with "...if you get good grades this quarter, we'll help pay for your ski equipment." (Todd, 1989) For Callie, "They told me if I ever got a 4.0 (grade point average), they'd give me \$100 for every report card I did that on. I never did get an all 'A' report card, but I don't think I ever got anything lower than a 'B-' in class." (Callie, 2009)

One participant in each of the two generational groups, Robin and Seth, stated that their parents did not convey expectations about whether or not they accomplished homework. Robin described high school as a contentious time with her mother, “Mom gave up on me in high school, so any good grades I got were of my own doing,” (Robin, 1990) while Seth, who was raised by a single father stated, “My dad really wasn’t around. He was working so much and he would get home kind of late. I was kind of on my own.” (Seth, 2014)

It is of note that of the 14 participants, three had mothers who had college degrees as teachers in the 1985-1995 group. For Michelle, even though her railroad worker father did not see the point in the need for college, she felt support from her mother. “...my mom was a teacher, and education was important to her.” (Michelle, 1985) Even though her high school years were contentious with her mother, Robin described the influence of her mother who had gotten a teaching degree after Robin’s father had died when she was a young girl, “ the foundation was there from the younger years. You know when I was younger she was really involved – she was a teacher at the school that I went to. She volunteered. She took us to artistic things – plays, concerts – so the foundation was there.” (Robin, 1990)

In summary, whether spoken or unspoken, participants experienced their parents as having expectations of them either explicitly to get their homework done, earn certain grades or as characterized by Jim, whose father worked on the railroad and “was never very thrilled with school” to “Go out and do your best. And I guess I kind of did that and the grades followed.” (Jim, 1986) All participants relayed that their grades were average or

above average, with Pecos Bill sharing that some of his classes were taught at a more basic level.

Educational Attainment

This second component examines parents' expectations and hopes for the level of educational achievement their child would attain. Table 11 summarizes this information.

Table 11. Parents' expectations for child graduating from college.

Generational Groups	n	Parents Voiced Expectations	Participant Fulfilled Parent Expectations	Parent Did Not Voice Expectations
1985-1995	8	4	3 of 4	4
2005-2015	6	3	0	3

When participants were asked if their parents had an expectation of how far they would go in their education, both generational groups were split, with half stating that their parents did not have an expectation for college, but, as characterized by Patience, "they were thrilled with the idea that I wanted to go to college and that I would fight to get there." (Patience, 1985) When Michelle came home one day and told her parents she was looking at an out-of-state private university, and gave them an idea of the cost, she remembered:

And my Dad just looked at me and said, 'You know, if you want to go to that god-damned expensive school, you can get there yourself.' I was just crushed and heartbroken. I remember running upstairs crying and then all of a sudden I went, 'Darn it. I'm going to do it. I'm going to figure out how to do it.' (Michelle, Class of 1985)

While Michelle's father was the only participant who actively discouraged his daughter's path to college, Dominic said that, "my father, in particular, has always wanted me to just

go into a manual work field, and that's something that I don't feel really comfortable with." (Dominic, 2010) Although Dominic's parents did not have an expectation for him to go to college, in the end they took out school loans for him in their names so that he could go attend.

For those participants whose parents did not voice an expectation that they would attend college, these parents saw an opportunity for their children to have a better life. Todd's father stated that he wanted something better for Todd, so that he would not beat up his body in construction work. Robin also characterizes this in her statement that after her father died and her mother went to college to become a teacher, "we just understood that's what you did if you wanted to make your life better." For Wyatt, whose mother was also a teacher and stepfather was a rancher:

They expected me to go to college and get my bachelors. There wasn't anything like, 'Yeah, we want you to be a doctor or an engineer.' There wasn't a lot of direction about what sort of career path we should choose. (Wyatt, Class of 1993)

For parents who had conversations with their children about college, participants described how their parents followed their leads, wanting to provide encouragement, as Kristen expresses, "...just basically from what I was saying I wanted to do, they expected that I was going to do it (college) because my Mom never went to college." (Kristen, 2013) While similarities abound between the two generational groups, there are also differences as the interplay between finances and parent expectations emerge. Table 12 summarizes this information.

Table 12. Highest level of educational attainment

Generational Groups	n	High School	Some College	Completed 2-Year College	Bachelor's Degree and Beyond
1985-1995	8	0	1	0	7
2005-2015	6	2	2	1	1

In the 1985-1995 group, seven of the eight participants attained college degrees, with Robin ending college one-year shy of graduation. In the interviews, although lives are disrupted when Burlington Northern pulled out of Livingston, there is a tone, with the exception of Michelle, that going to college, even if you weren't sure what career you would pursue, was an opportunity. Radar characterizes this sentiment when asked 'Did your parents have an expectation of how far you would go in your education?':

No, really, for them it was – they knew what I was interested in, and I didn't really know what I was going to do after I graduated high school. It wasn't, 'You have to go to college' and all that... Seeing as they had not graduated from college – it wasn't them cracking the whip saying, 'You're going to go to college. You're going to do this.' It was, 'Hey, you've got an opportunity to go to college.' It was much harder for them back in the day, than it was for us to go to school. So, it was seen as a good opportunity we should definitely take advantage of. (Radar, Class of 1993)

A generation later, in the 2005-2015 group, there is a shift in sentiment and tone as financial stability and parent expectations interplay. For Constance, Callie, and Kristen, there was a stated expectation and hope by their parents that they would go on to attend college. Additionally, for Constance and Callie, their parents stated that they would pay for them to attend college, no matter the financial impact, "even if I have to sell our home," Constance was told by her father. Constance refused this offer, "I was not willing to take away everything he had worked for just so I could pursue an

education. And I wasn't even sure I wanted it." Callie describes a similar financial sacrifice her parents would have to make had she pursued college. Constance sums up this situation:

It was very understood from the get go that my Dad wanted me to go to college... Growing up I never thought I would do anything but go to college. I figured that was actually the next step, and it wasn't until I got later into my high school years, that I realized that it wasn't something I was probably going to pursue right away....Being in Livingston, especially during the time I was there, the economy was failing. A lot of the small town businesses were starting to close. And I made the decision not to pursue college. I gave up scholarships to remain in Livingston, mainly because I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I didn't want to put myself into the debt that was required for college, especially watching all my friends go for about two years and drop out, and be in so much debt. (Constance, Class of 2008)

So while their parents hoped and talked with them about going on to college, concerns about uncertainty regarding a career path, combined with concerns about the effects of debt on both themselves and their parents have an effect on the 2005-2015 group's next step. In the 1985-1995 group, Sally, whose parents also had the expectation that she would go to college, as well as Todd and Radar, received a high level of financial support from their families for college, even though there was uncertainty about the career path of the three. While the 1985-1995 group had a high level of college completion, all attending college within a year after leaving high school, and all but one attaining a bachelor's degree or more, a generation later, four of six participants went on for further education. Callie attempted a year of online school, and Kristen completed two years of college, switching to an online technical school. Pecos Bill completed a trade school with an associate's degree in welding. One of six has completed a bachelor's degree, Dominic, at the time of this study.

In summary, parent expectations for how much education their children would pursue was similar in the two generational groups, with an equal number of parents hoping or expecting their children to go to college. The discernable difference between the two groups lies in the interplay of parent expectations and economic realities. The younger 2005-2015 group demonstrates a high level of concern about whether or not the cost of higher education is worth the sacrifice. With the exception of Dominic, who sees education as important both for itself and for upward economic mobility, the other participants felt that they did not have the luxury of exploring what they might do in their lives while paying for college.

Factor Two: Financial Stability

This study finds that the family's financial situation has a profound impact on the decisions made and the perceived "choices" students feel they have as they make decisions about their next steps after high school and their future careers. While there appears to be a complex interplay between the family's financial situation and the other factors that are discussed in these results, this section focuses on four areas: (1) the influence of the pulling out of the Burlington Northern; (2) how what one's parents did for a living influence the path from high school; (3) family stress regarding finances, and (4) how college or trade school was financed as participants graduated from high school. In each of the following sections, emergent themes, and similarities and differences between the two generations are discussed.

The Railroad

Interviews began with a gathering of background information about birthplace, years in Livingston or Park County, schools attended, type of work engaged in and educational attainment of participants and of their parents. As has been previously discussed, in order to preserve anonymity, identifying information will be disguised as results are presented.

For those in the 1985-1995 group, three of the eight participants had fathers who worked in the trades for the Burlington Northern. Jim recounts:

So they got to pick, I think between four different places – Glendive, (Montana); Alliance, Nebraska; Burlington, Iowa; and Galesburg, Illinois. And Dad picked Burlington. So he wound up leaving to go to Burlington – it was January of '86 – and I was finishing up my senior year, so we stayed so I could finish school. He went out there, worked, and came back here as time would allow. And then shortly after I graduated, the house was sold and we moved to Burlington. I remember not being thrilled about the whole situation. We were leaving someplace that, for all intents and purposes – you know, living in the same house for 18 years at the time – that was everything that I had known, so leaving there was a big adjustment. (Jim, Class of 1986)

Patience described her family's move as the "shattering" of her family, as they moved out of the home her dad had built and her extended family scattered to various communities.

While their fathers were able to continue working for BN, all three describe negative economic effects of the move. When Michelle's family moved to Burlington, her mother was required to return to college in order to receive an Iowa teaching certification. Her mother did not feel she could afford to do this. She became a homemaker. Jim, too, described that the housing market in Burlington was less affordable and that it took some years for his parents to get on the feet financially, which took its toll on a younger

sibling. Robin described how her future husband's family business closed its doors "because the town just sort of shut down for a few years" and Wyatt described that his mother did not teach for a few years after the closure due to, he thought, declines in student population.

For other participants in the 1985-1995 generational group whose families remained in Livingston, those closest to the BN pullout, Sally, Todd, and Robin, all described the loss of friends. "I remember a lot of kids – a lot of people, were just gone." (Todd, 1989) Sally quantified her loss of friends, "...most of my friends left. It was a tough four years (of high school), because most of them went to Alliance, Nebraska or Iowa... three of my very, very close friends and maybe eight to ten other friends that I had." (Sally, 1987)

Participants in the 2005-2015 generational group were asked if the railroad town history had any effect on what they decided to do after high school. The women in this group stated they were not affected, "I don't know a single woman that works for Montana Rail Link (in Livingston)." (Callie, 2009) Pecos, looked at the possibility of a four-year apprenticeship with Montana Rail Link, but decided, "I didn't really want to work on the railroad that much. It does pay well, but I've been told that there's quite a lot of layoffs within the past year or two." (Pecos Bill, 2013) A similar disenchantment with the railroad is echoed in Constance's thoughts as she and her husband sought work:

Being in Livingston, when you're attempting to find work, you look for companies that provide insurance and that have a history of being stable. The railroad definitely provides that for Livingston. They've been there for a long time, and while they don't employ a large amount of people in Livingston they are consistent with their work. We did look into working there, but the biggest hindrance for us was that should you be hired, you

would be required to go where it was they needed you, which did not appeal to us at all, especially with our families being in Livingston. (Constance, Class of 2008)

In summary, when looking at the effect of the BN closure in Livingston of participants as they moved from high school to college and work, while three of the fourteen families of participants were directly affected, others stated they did not feel personally affected except by the loss of friends and the concerns about living in a town that was economically struggling. In reading the interviews, one gets the sense that there is a world of possibilities and then, a generation later, there is sense of figuring out how to make one's way in the economic aftermath. Robin characterizes a common sentiment (below) and prediction for the future generation with:

I think it (the railroad closure) affected a lot of people in the town, because people used to say, 'Well, I don't need to get an education, I'm just going to work for the railroad, because I can get paid a lot better. And then they had to re-think that once that wasn't an option anymore. (Robin, Class of 1990)

While further education was seen as the way to survive financially after the closure of the railroad, the participants in this study from working class families from the 2005-2015 generational group question this sentiment as they struggle to get their financial footing.

The Influence of Parents' Work

Most participants in the study articulated that what their parents did for a living influenced them in a positive or a negative way. Dominic's sentiment, "We're a lower middle class family and I've always wanted to bring myself out of that financial circumstance," (Dominic, 2010) is said in a variety of ways from participants in both generational groups. Participants hoped to be financially better off than their parents, to

not struggle economically as they had seen their parents struggle or to “do more for my family” as Jim put it. Callie described that she would likely not want to own a business after witnessing how hard it was for her parents keep a strong business running in an economically depressed community. Still others were affected less by the particular work done by their parents, but by their parents’ work ethic, “While they didn’t go to college, they did invest a lot of effort gaining the knowledge and skills that they have.” (Constance, 2008) For Seth whose father did get a degree, but did not use it, instead going into construction:

That really kind of opened my eyes to fact that you can be successful without going to college. I mean, because he’s still in debt. I know a lot of people that are still paying off school loans and they’re 20 years out of school. (Seth, Class of 2014)

While Todd eventually went into the family business when he could not get a job in his field and the cost of graduate school was not something he felt he could afford, it was in retrospect that he appreciated the satisfaction of the kind of work done in the family business. Wyatt, whose father was a rancher, loved agriculture and wanted to stay in the area in order to continue to ranch.

In summary, parents’ work influenced the participants in ways that either helped them to know what they did not want to do for a living or else there were aspects of their work or work ethic that provided a positive influence.

Financial Stress.

Thirteen of fourteen participants perceived that their parents had ongoing financial concerns. What is of note is that in the 2005-2015 group is that financial stressors are of a different magnitude. For example, there were concerns about affording

health insurance and whether or not a home would go into foreclosure versus concerns about what kinds of vacations the family would be able to afford in the 1985-1995 group. For two of the six in the 2005-2015 group, two participants grew up with mothers who had significant health issues that affected their ability to work. One participant, too, in the 1985-1995 group had a father who became disabled, which she described as “putting a cloud over our family.” All participants discussed that their family’s financial situation influenced their next steps as they transitioned from high school.

1985-1995. Todd described that his father was “always concerned about having work and worrying about what the next job was going to be.” He said that he remembered his father making references about being concerned that if work dried up he might be “going to the poor house.” (Todd, 1989) Jim, although his father worked for the railroad, said that the worry was “constantly there.” He adds:

I remember the concern about finances and what we could and what we couldn’t do – vacations we could take, or vacations we couldn’t take – I don’t know that I would consider us poor necessarily, but it was something – that we were kind of careful with the funds, just because there wasn’t a lot to go around. (Jim, Class of 1986)

The financial situation changed for Robin when her mother, who had become a teacher, remarried. “There was definitely an economic change in our household. Even though she was the one with the education, he was the better breadwinner.” Wyatt recalled his mother and stepfather struggling as they took out loans against the ranch in order to attempt to make the enterprise break even. During Wyatt’s high school years, his father began a more lucrative career in real estate, around the time there was urban to rural immigration in the Paradise Valley. For Todd, his family moved to the Paradise Valley

after his father retired from civic service, getting a tenfold return on the sale of their home in southern California. This enabled his family to purchase a home and land with money in the bank. Sally recalled, “I know now that it was tight (family finances), now that I’m older, but they never made that apparent.” Nearly all participants in this generational group had fathers who also had side-jobs in addition to their full-time work.

2005-2015. A different picture emerges in this generational group. All speak of the financial stress experienced by their families.

“It’s a pretty constant thing in our lives” and “My parents fought a lot through high school, and a lot of that was financial. We knew it was financial. We heard the arguments – the fights – and it always started with money.” (Constance, Class of 2008).

Another participant described that even though she didn’t recall when they couldn’t pay the bills, that there were times like “during Christmas, they’re like, ‘Okay, we’re going to do one big thing’ and then little tiny things, which was always fine...” (Kristen, 2013)

For two participants, their financial situations were sometimes precarious.

There was a point in between where some mortgage company called us and they were going to take our home away, but the old man got a lawyer and got it all situated out and we were able to keep our house. (Pecos Bill, Class of 2013)

Seth also describes a time when he was in high school and his father was working out of state and not sending money home, so Seth worked full-time and made the mortgage payments. When asked whether he was worried about whether he was going to be able to pay the mortgage, Seth replied, “Not once. I had a stable job.” As he was working six days a week while going to high school, on Sundays, “I was always picking up other

work, going and shoveling out people's barns and helping people planting and farming – just kind of anything I could.” (Seth, 2014)

The impact of the family's financial situation on the participants also differed by generational group. For the 1985-1995 group, the common sentiment in the group was that they wanted an education, wanted more security, wanted to not have to struggle to find work. Sally reflected,

My mom, to get a job – it was tough for her to find a job, but when she did find a job she loved it. But it wasn't an easy task and she didn't get paid what she would have been paid had she had an education. My dad...after so many years, he still only got two weeks of vacation...So they knew that I had to get there (to college), in order for me to get what I should deserve, I had to get an education. So they made sure they'd make it happen. (Sally, Class of 1987)

Sally's parents went on to pay for Sally to attend an in-state college, taking out loans, but for Dominic in the 2005-2015 group, the situation is different. Dominic's parents also took out loans for him so that he could go to college, but are in a position today where there is concern about whether or they will be to assist his younger sibling as she attempts to make her way to school, due to the family's indebtedness caused by Dominic's loans.

In the 2005-2015 group, four of the six participants discuss how their parents economic situation affected them financially as they looked at the possibility of college. This was characterized by Constance as “I was on that brink where I was too rich to get a lot of the financial assistance that was available, but I was too poor to actually be able to afford it [college].” She and others saw the same situation for her peers:

They wanted to go to college, but there was a lack of the finances. Their parents were trying everything they could to make sure that their kid could go, but there was such a lack of what was available to people in our situation. There wasn't a ton of grants.... You know, my Dad would have

done anything. He would have sold his house to send us to school. I have absolutely no doubt about it. (Constance, Class of 2008)

Another participant added that even though she had good grades, and her parents were willing to pay, she saw their financial situation and could not ask more of them.

In summary, the magnitude of the financial struggle that the 1985-1995 generation group faced is notably different from that faced by the 2005-2015 group in this study. While the earlier group seeks upward economic mobility through college, the latter group has difficulty seeing their way to college because of the family's economic situation and the fear of the indebtedness that awaits them should they attempt to pursue a college degree.

Financing College and Trade School

Twelve of the fourteen participants pursued education after high school. Participants indicated that for four of the fourteen, their parents bore the brunt of the expense of college. Two participants in the 1985-1995 group received help from scholarships.

1985-1995. In the 1985-1995 group, all who attended college had a part-time job or had saved money from jobs in order to help finance college. Both Radar and Todd had parents who had been able to save money for college. Sally's parents took out loans, but they repaid them, not her. Wyatt's mother made him into a "scholarship writing machine," to help defray costs. For Jim:

I set a goal to be able to get good enough grades to where I could get some academic scholarships. And then through my sports activities, was looking to get some kind of athletic scholarship as well, that would help to offset

that. And then, whatever was left over, just had to do a loan for. That was the way I did it. (Jim, Class of 1985)

While Robin had insurance money that had been set aside after her father's death, which helped for a semester in an out-of-state university, she ended up leaving school a year short of her degree, mainly due to financial reasons and her decision to not take out additional loans. Robin, Constance, and Michelle echoed issues raised also by the 2005-2015 group that their parents' income and assets did not allow them to qualify for grants, even though they were footing the expense of college themselves. They financed their education through work and loans until their parents no longer claimed them on taxes, and they could help offset tuition then with grants.

2005-2015. In this generational group, one of the six had parents who paid for her education by taking on the debt of her student loans. Two other participant's families, while taking out loans in their own names, expected their children to pay off these loans when the time comes. While Callie's parents planned to pay for her college through loans, she, like Constance, did not want to burden them with debt. Callie looked for online schools because she thought this would be less expensive than college. Callie recounts:

I didn't know what they could afford. I just know that they said they would pay for it. Even now, with my schooling, I think I ended up getting into about \$15,000 in loans without even getting a degree, just for online classes for a couple years. Even that they're struggling to pay for...Now they're [my parents are] living paycheck to paycheck, like most people that live in Livingston do. It was probably a good idea that I made that decision, because if I had gone to a really nice school and gotten a really nice degree they wouldn't have been able to afford it, and I couldn't pay for it right now [due to present life situation], so I'd be in debt up to my earlobes. I don't even know if I would use that degree. (Callie, Class of 2009)

Kristen, too, moved to online school where she pays \$50 a month, after two years at Montana State University, after she decided that she would pursue an offshoot of her major. Pecos Bill worked while attending a two-year vocational-technical school, and accumulated loans, “As of right now, I owe, \$10,101 worth of student loans, which ain’t bad. I’m paying them off... They’re like \$104.53 [a month]. That’s the minimum I’ve got to pay.”

In summary, for the 1985-1995 group, for most participants, there is clear indication of more financial planning and preparation as students prepared to go to college. For the 2005-2015 group, there is an awareness of cost of tuition and of debt. It is of note that these young people sense their parents’ tenuous financial situations and are unwilling to burden them with debt.

In conclusion, a family’s financial situation is a factor that plays a role in determining one’s path from high school. This was determined by examining participant responses in four areas: (1) the influence of the Burlington Northern pulling out of Livingston; (2) how what one’s parents did for a living influenced the path from high school; (3) family stress regarding finances, and (4) how college or trade school was financed after participants graduated from high school. Two themes emerge from the data. *College is an investment*: for the 1985-1995 group, education was seen as a way to gain economic stability as an adult, even if you were not sure of your career path. For the 2005-2015 generational group, the theme that emerges is *College is a gamble*: education past high school comes with a high financial risk, and with no guarantee of upward economic mobility. The participants in this group did not feel they had the luxury of

college with the idea of exploring career paths, or if they did, as for Dominic, also have to deal with the daunting financial situation he and his family will face in the future.

Factor Three: Community and School Involvement and Networks

A third factor that comes to bear on the transition from high school has to do with both the level of involvement in school and community and meaningful connections formed with members of the community and school. This section presents results in the following areas: (1) Involvement in community and school activities; (2) School and community mentors, and (3) Ties to the community.

Involvement in Community and School Activities

Table 13 gives a synopsis of participant involvement in school, community and church activities when they attended high school. School activities discussed by participants include membership in groups such Future Farmers of America (FFA), Band, Choir, Cheerleading, Rangerettes (a dance team), Truth, Nobility and Trust (TNT) (a volunteer group for girls), Student Council, National Honor Society (NHS), Business Professionals of America (BPA). Athletics included sports such as volleyball, softball, football, basketball, golf, track and field, and tennis. Other co-curricular and extra-activities participants discussed included participation in the science fair, Youth Legislation, Foreign Language Days, Model U.N. and Girl's State.

Activities discussed in which participants and their families took part in included church and church activities such as Sunday School or a youth group, 4-H, and Scouts.

Community athletics such as sports camps were discussed. While formal activities are accounted for in the table, participants also discussed informal activities with peers, families or mentors such as time spent fishing, hunting, skiing, backpacking, bowling, hanging out at the skateboarding park, engagement in hobbies, and volunteer activities. All but one participant held down some sort of employment sometime during their high school years. For some, it was summer work or babysitting, for others like Seth, it was full-time work.

Table 13. Level of Involvement in School and Community Activities.

Generational Groups	n	Participated in School Activities	High Level Involvement in School Activities	Little or No Involvement in School Activities	Participated in Community Activities	High Level Involvement in Community Activities	Little or No Involvement in Community Activities
1985-1995	8	7	6	2	7	7	1
2005-2015	6	6	3	3	2	1	5

1985-1995. As seen in Table 13, the 1985-1995 group was more involved in school and community activities than the 2005-2015 group. Constance, who was not involved in school activities, lived in a rural setting and was responsible for caring for her younger siblings. She stated that did she not feel a sense of connection to the school and felt that her classes in her first years of high school did not have the rigor she had experienced at the local Catholic school she had attended during her K-8 years. While Sally was minimally involved in school, playing one sport and in one club, she was very involved in church and community service activities with her mother, and with her part-time job. When asked if involvement in activities and part-time jobs influenced her post-

high school path, Michelle's response characterized the thoughts echoed by Sally and others:

It [involvement] probably brought structure and commitment and dedication. You know, being a part of a team, or being a part – an employee in an office. I know when I went to college people used to comment, because I seemed to have a lot of experience... So it was easy for me to get jobs on campus, in more than just the cafeteria kinds of jobs or the front desk in the dorm. (Michelle, Class of 1985)

For Wyatt, his involvement in 4-H, from a boy until he graduated from high school, “allowed me to – there was a big emphasis in my family about saving money for college – that allowed me to put away a lot of money for school. I sold pigs.” Sally, Todd and Michelle voiced that school and community activities helped them to figure out what they might do for a career. For Todd, “You’d build the walls in one day, and at the end of the day it’s like, ‘Yeah, there’s all the walls.’” Still others discussed how they wanted to work and often did odd jobs mowing lawns, but their parents prioritized homework. Radar commented, “Really, my folks weren’t big into my washing dishes or something when I could be doing homework.”

2005-2015. Half of the 2005-2015 group had a high level of involvement in school activities and one of seven had a high level of involvement in community. For Kristen, her involvement in various aspects of 4-H throughout her high school years, allowed her to coach and teach and has influenced the path she is now taking. Kristen also had a high level of involvement with high school athletics. For Pecos Bill and Seth, they felt a high level of commitment to FFA, which ran its program year-round.

Why was there a lack of involvement in community activities for the 2005-2015 generation group? It is apparent in the interviews that for Constance, Pecos Bill, and Seth that work had a more important role in their lives. Constance had decided that she did not want to burden her parents financially, to pay for items like a vehicle, car insurance, a cell phone and clothing, so she moved her way to a supervisory position in a restaurant while she still attended high school. Seth, who, at times, took on the responsibility of making the mortgage payment said:

I worked. Pretty much, since I was in the 6th grade have always had a job. Since Freshman year I've had a year-round job...I would work Monday through Friday after school. I'd get out of school at 1 o'clock, work 'till 6, work Saturdays, work Sundays, and then start over Monday. (Seth, Class of 2014)

In his interview Seth described how in high school, work came first and school came second. It is of note, though, that while in high school Seth was involved in both FFA and was a member of Student Council. Work and activities did not dominate Callie's life, as she spent time hanging out with friends at the bowling alley and the skateboarding park.

In summary, in examining both generation groups, the earlier participants were more involved in both school and community activities than those who have most recently attended school. We see an interplay of factors at work again, as some participants take on jobs in a more serious fashion due to, it appears, family need as well as to pay for the additional accoutrements that come with today's teen years – a greater need to have one's own vehicle to drive to work (and as an indicator of independence) along with fuel, payment, the accompanying insurance and cell phones.

School and Community Mentors

A question asked in the interviews was whether or not the participants had mentors or important adults in their lives that they talked with about what they might do after high school. Table 14 summarizes this information.

Table 14. Mentors in High School.

Generational Groups	n	Community	Family	School	Church	None
1985-1995	8	2	4	4	1	1
2005-2015	6	0	3	3	0	1

Michelle had both school and community mentors whom she talked with about what she might do after she graduated from high school. As Michelle struggled with the lack of support from her father about going to an out-of-state college, she received support from the women in the doctor's office where she worked. "I feel like I was surrounded by older people that kind of knew what my hopes and dreams were, and were supportive." (Michelle, 1985) Todd recalls talking with his youth group leaders from his church, who were also teachers at the high school in an alternative program. They tried "to get me thinking about something beyond high school, like what was going to happen after high school." (Todd, 1989) For Radar, there was a community member who shared his interest in electronics:

...he was teaching other people how to get licensed and do other stuff. Between that and my family, and my ability to understand logically how to write programs and design circuits and stuff - that was the driving force for college, I guess. (Radar, Class of 1993)

While Dominic spoke with his English and World Language teachers about next steps after high school, Pecos Bill and Seth felt close ties with their Agricultural and Industrial Education teachers and with a high school secretary.

For the 1985-1995 group, there is a more diverse network of support. For the 2005-2015 group, there is a narrower community of support – school and family. Does this narrower social network also confine one’s view of one’s future?

Ties to the Community

An interview question asked was whether or not participants wanted to leave or stay in the community and how did leaving or staying factor into their path from high school. The following Table 15 provides a general summary of participant answers.

Table 15. Intention to Stay or Leave the Community After High School.

Generational Groups	n	Wanted to Leave	Wanted to Stay	Now lives in/near Community	Now lives in Montana	Now lives outside Montana
1985-1995	8	4	4	5	1	2
2005-2015	6	3	3	4	1	1

In both generational groups, half wanted to leave to explore the world and to be in a big city. For Jim and Patience, while they expected to go away to college after high school, they intended to stay or to return after college. Unlike for Patience who revealed, “It fractured the home base that I had. So, after the BN left, did I want to come back? No. It wasn’t home anymore.” Jim reflected, “I never really thought of leaving Montana until it was really kind of forced on us.”

In both generational groups were participants who came to Montana after having lived elsewhere and these three wanted to remain in the community. Radar captures this sentiment:

Yeah, I never wanted to leave. Coming from [a large city], I knew what that was like, and coming to here – this was like, amazing. Here we had fishing, hiking – my big interests, outside of school were skiing and backpacking and fishing, hiking and all that. So we spent the summer months when we weren't working – me and [names of friends] – we did a lot of backpacking together. So getting a taste of that in my teens, and then looking at college – I didn't even want to leave for college. (Radar, Class of 1993)

Participants in both generational groups describe leaving and then deciding that they wanted to be closer to family and a community they knew. Kristen, although she lives in a neighboring community and comes to Livingston at least weekly commented:

I miss Livingston....I just miss the town and knowing people and all that...I got the whole big town experience and really didn't care for it, and then we moved to a smaller town [Livingston] where people actually know you and say, 'Hey! You're that girl who does [named the sport] and was in the newspaper' and stuff like that. (Kristen, Class of 2013)

Where the two groups differ is in the interplay of family finances and being able to plan for the future. Callie describes feeling conflicted. She had good grades and had planned to go to school, but “restricted on the things I could have done” because her understanding was that she would have had to live on campus had she attended the university in a neighboring town, and her family could not afford that. She adds:

I don't know that many friends who actually left the state. They either left to Missoula or to Bozeman for schooling, so they didn't go very far. I don't know a lot of people – maybe a few that left the state to go to school – and if they did they came from wealthier families for sure. They could afford to haul their kid off to another state and give them everything they needed to go to school there. (Callie, Class of 2009)

Callie's perception is an interesting one. For example, in the 1985-1995 group of working class families, six of eight participants began their post high school years in colleges out-of-state. While Dominic is currently in Livingston, it is due to his financial situation and he will leave when he goes to graduate school. Seth is bonded to and feels responsible for their home and acreage. After his time making the mortgage payment:

I kind of got grand-fathered into pretty much staying here... Even now he [dad] talks about leaving again, so I'm kind of stuck – it's actually I'm not stuck, I'm privileged with it because – I mean I'm my Dad's my best friend right now and it's just awesome. (Seth, Class of 2014)

In summary, in the earlier generational group, staying or leaving the community appears to have been more a straightforward decision or choice. In the 2005-2015 group, family finances play a larger role in the decision of whether or not to stay or leave the community.

This section presented results from a constellation of data which examined how the transition from high school was influenced by the participant's level of involvement in school and community and by connections that were formed with members of the community and school which may have helped the participant make the transition from high school. The areas explored were: (1) Involvement in community and school activities; (2) School and community mentors, and (3) Ties to the community.

Factor Four: High School

This section presents data that has to do with the role of high school in assisting students in making the transition from high school. The first two areas: (1) View of self as a student and (2) What teachers value, comes out of responses to questions that

explored not only teacher relations with students, but also looks at self-confidence and competence and how this may or may not have affected next steps past high school for the participants. The third area (3) Assistance in making the transition describes participants' experiences with guidance counselors and other school personnel who may have helped make the path in understanding next steps clearer and provided support. This section also looks at whether students had experiences with apprentices, career internships, job shadowing and similar experiences which may have helped to clarify career paths. The fourth area (4) Advice to my high school gave participants an opportunity to reflect upon the experience and critique what they wished the school could have done better to assist them in making the transition from high school and into adulthood.

View of Self as a Student

Participants were asked how they viewed or felt about themselves as students when they attended high school. They were then asked if the view they had of themselves as students influenced their path from high school and were asked to describe. This was followed up with a question about if their view of themselves changed over the years. It should be noted that those who graduated from high school recently have not had the benefit or distortion of years of reflection.

All respondents in the study considered themselves to be average or above average students. Most acknowledged that they could have done better had they tried harder, for example, by studying more or paying better attention in class. Levels of academic engagement are described below.

Table 16. Level of Academic Engagement in High School.

Generational Groups	n	Engaged	Not Engaged	Engaged in Certain Classes, but Not in Others
1985-1995	8	3	3	2
2005-2015	6	3	1	2

Feeling capable, confident and having a positive view of teachers were voiced for those who felt engaged in academics in high school. Michelle described: “I was conscientious,” while Jim reflected:

I guess I felt confident there. I felt like the expectations that we set, I guess as a basketball team – you know, there was always the expectation of doing well in school, right? To keep your grades up to be on the team. As a function of being part of a successful group, like the team was, there was a level of confidence that kind of came with that.” (Jim, Class of 1986)

For Callie, referring to herself as “definitely engaged,” simultaneously reflected “I don’t think I necessarily pushed myself, because I honestly don’t feel the curriculum in Livingston is all that challenging compared to what I was used to [in a larger city].” (Callie, 2009) Callie described her love of science and that she took “every science class you could possibly take in the school.” For Michelle, as she grew in confidence during her high school years, she recalled that in her junior year of high school, she was selected to attend Girl’s State in Helena and students stayed in the dorms at Carroll College. In addition to this experience being a confidence boost, she reflected:

That’s really kind of what sealed the deal for me to say, ‘I’m going to college.’ It was really fun to be away and kind of live in a dorm and meet a lot of people from difference places and work with them and kind of learn. (Michelle, Class of 1985)

For Michelle, as for others, she sees herself continuing to grow as a learner:

...even in my job today, I'm learning so much. I like doing new and different things. Just kind of exposing myself to different areas or different thoughts – I like being around people that see differently than I do or think differently, because it makes me question, 'Well, why do I feel the way I feel,' or 'Why do I think the way I think?' (Michelle, Class of 1985)

Dominic, too, felt that his view of himself as student helped to solidify that he wanted to find “work in a more scholastic environment than one that was concentrated solely on labor.”

Those who were not engaged in academic work or classes in high school had differing experiences. Sally saw herself as an average student who “skated by with what I had to skate by with,” while Todd struggled with seeing how class work applied to life. For Patience, though she described herself as working hard for the grades she earned and struggled with Science and Math because she was “dead-set on making it into college” described:

I loved English. I loved writing....Once I got to high school, I have to say the first couple of years the English classes I was taking or involved in were a let-down. They definitely were not challenging enough. The concepts and the things that were being taught were things that my 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teachers had focused heavily on, and so I knew more. So I was bored to tears. (Patience, Class of 1985)

Patience attended school in her elementary years at St. Mary's, the local Catholic school. She described that after her first couple of years that she was able to take higher level English classes that worked better for her. Constance too, in the 2005-2015, felt herself to be bored, although capable and able to retain information. While maintaining good grades, she described herself as “the ultimate procrastinator. I had it down to a fine art.”

She paid close attention to how classes were placed in her daily schedule so that she could efficiently get work done.

For Patience, Todd and Sally, when they were able to get into higher level classes in college, their vision of themselves as learners shifted. Sally describes that when she transferred to Montana State University for her last two years of college:

...it was A's and B's, and it felt better. I felt like I was achieving. I had, what I feel were the best professors when I got into those upper level classes that really instilled that in me. I mean, they made it interesting. I knew I could be successful. They talked about things that we could do when we got out [of college], and it was life-changing, honestly. (Sally, Class of 1987)

Sally went on to reflect, “Had I applied myself more, I would have had the opportunity for different schooling – scholarships and what have you. I’d have been able to branch out.”

For those who were clearly engaged in some classes and not in others, there was a sharp division between enjoying reading and writing and disliking math and science or vice versa. For Seth who worked full-time, “I struggled in English, but that’s just because the workload was so much, going home and doing three hours of homework after work and then going back to school. Getting no sleep. Being tired all the time.” (Seth, 2014)

Radar echoed Sally’s sentiments when he recounted a story in which he made a bet with a friend who was also at his “D” level, “just basically getting by” as they went into a Chemistry final:

So we made a bet... ‘Hey, I’ll get a better grade on the final than you. Then he went off and got a chemistry degree, so he was really good at this. I crammed 24 hours straight and I aced the final. (*laughter*) I guess that

was sort of like a kick in the face – sort of like, ‘Man, I really could of – if I would have just applied myself a bit more, I might have done well at this.’ (Radar, Class of 1993)

Radar’s view of himself as a student changed little over the years, “College was a major struggle for me too. I got my degree by the skin of my teeth.”

An anecdote told by Robin, who did well in her three years of college, sums up this section and names another emergent theme in this study: *In the Name of Your Future Self*. In Robin’s words:

You know that I homeschooled the kids when they were younger – I thought, ‘I’m going to have to teach them Algebra,’ so I re-took it and did really well. I could do it. That was like a big thing. I don’t know if I just wasn’t ready in high school or I just didn’t care. And I think it was that I just didn’t care. I think that could have done it if I just would have applied myself. But that’s just something you learn as an adult – sometimes you just have to apply yourself. And in high school, a lot of times you get caught being asked to do things that you don’t really care about, *in the name of your future self* [emphasis added]. It’s hard to see the bigger picture. (Robin, Class of 1990)

Whether reasons for not performing to one’s potential has to do with not applying oneself, not caring, or are materially-determined, as in one’s financial situation, so much of what is asked of high school students is to strive to be educated “in the name of your future self.”

What Teachers Value

Questions asked in the interviews explored participant’s perceptions of teachers who had positive impacts on them. This was an attempt to understand how non-cognitive skills, attitudes and dispositions that are important for college and work affected

participants. Participants were then asked if the teacher described or what the teacher valued in a student had an effect on their post-high school decisions.

In the findings, there were similar and overlapping responses between the two generational groups. The most frequent was that participants valued teachers who recognized students as individuals and would take time to listen and consider them.

Robin describes a teacher who influenced the direction she would take after high school:

He would take the time to actually listen to what you said in class. He would honestly think about it. You would see him stop and think, and then respond with something that he thought about what you said. It was like, 'Oh. He really is thinking about us as people.' (Robin, Class of 1990)

Radar similarly described a teacher, "he could see that spark of interest there and would really-he could see, 'Okay, these kids are really taking it to the next level, and I'm going to feed that as much as I can to help them.'" He then went on to describe that this teacher influenced his path from high school by encouraging Radar and some of his peers to take an A.P. exam even though he had not taken the class and they passed it, thereby helping Radar bypass a couple of college classes and giving him confidence.

Constance and others described that teachers who had a positive influence on her valued a blend of commitment and honesty. She described this as the commitment and "ability to admit where there was a problem, either in or out of school. I feel that's where the honesty comes in, you know." She described commitment as "Being able to fully communicate with them about what your needs were and taking steps to better the situation, especially when it came to education." Seth echoed that he thought teachers valued honesty, "not giving excuses, not beating around the bush... to show up and be like, 'I was late' and make up an excuse – they know you're lying."

Sally responded well to those teachers who were able to focus on what she did well, instead of what she did wrong. She described a coach who “knew I had the potential and pulled it out of me.” Knowing when to pull and when to push was discussed. While Michelle valued those teachers who were “pushing you to do more – kind of pushing you outside what you thought your boundaries were,” Callie recounted another teacher who pushed:

He was really great because he let everybody be themselves, whether they were really goofy, or acted out a little bit and things like that – he still pushed you to learn well. And he’s super-smart. I mean he knows so many different languages and things, and I think that kind of rubs off on the students. (Callie, Class of 2009)

Other’s echoed Callie’s sentiment about how teachers who valued the content they taught had a contagious effect. Callie, who said that she refused to do homework “and repeat something over and over that I already knew well,” appreciated teachers who “would sit down with me and say, ‘Look, I know that this is something that you know, but you still need to do it.’ I think that helped me quite a bit in school, to keep [me] from slacking off.”

Three students in the 2005-2015 group talked about how teachers who helped them to organize themselves, manage their time, and figure out how to prioritize was valuable to them as they transitioned from high school (Kristen). For Pecos Bill, he valued a couple of teachers who imparted the message that when you “leave high school, ‘Always be ready on the job. Always do things right, even if you’ve got to double check. Make sure you’re doing it safely.’” Seth, too, credited his Career and Technical

Education teachers for “mentally preparing me for the workforce [and] physically preparing me for the workforce.”

In summary, there are many similarities between the generational groups and the influence they carried with them as they made the transition from high school. The difference between the two groups is in regard to the 2005-2015 group valuing skills, knowledge and attitudes they would need to be successful in the workforce.

Assistance in Making the Transition

The section examines the role of the school in assisting participants in making the transition past high school. Was there assistance or direction by a guidance department or teachers? Did they have the opportunity to examine the choices they might have for careers through career exploration opportunities? Table 17 looks at contacts with school personnel about making the transition past high school.

Table 17. Memory of discussions with guidance staff or teachers about post-high school plans.

Generational Groups	n	Talked with School Personnel Once	Talked with School Personnel More Than Once	Has no Memory of Individual or Group Talks with School Personnel
1985-1995	8	4	1	3
2005-2015	6	1	5	0

1985-1995. For the 1985-1995 generational group, four remember talking with guidance counselors either individually or in a group one time. For most, they admitted difficulty pulling this bit of information from their memories. Both Michelle and Patience had experiences that they referred to as “in spite of” experiences. Patience

recalls talking with her guidance counselor twice, once before taking the SAT, when he was encouraging and she walked out of his office feeling positive. The second experience was after her SAT scores were returned. After reviewing her scores and listening to her aspirations for college, she recounts:

And I see him sitting behind his desk shaking his head, saying, ‘No, no. Your scores aren’t good enough. You’re not excelling enough or high enough on the test to succeed in college. At which point in time I got up and walked out, and never went back...It infuriated me, because I mean I had taken every – what would be considered upper or as high as I could go – level classes, and stuck with those subjects that I struggled so hard with, and put forward the effort in order to make a bridge into college.
(Patience, Class of 1985)

Patience, who went on to get a Master’s degree, said that her guidance counselor tried to steer her toward clerical work or “the stereotypical female things of that time. I quit [activities like sewing and cooking]. I stopped cold turkey. I would not do any of it anymore because he told me that’s all I could do.” She then described that her fury spurred her to prove him wrong. She also described the experience as “the most negative experience I’ve probably experienced in the education world.” Similarly, Michelle’s “in spite of” experiences occurred, not only with her father, but with a teacher who taught “office practices.” Michelle had decided to work the year after high school. As well, she had been accepted to go on a tour of Europe with a choir group. The teacher talked with Michelle and said, “‘You know, typically, students that don’t go on to college right after high school – they never go.’” Michelle said that she kept this “in the back of my mind like, ‘I’m going to prove you wrong. I’m going to prove that statistic wrong.’”

Most participants in this generational group had no memory of speaking to a guidance counselor. Todd characterizes this as he recounts that he did speak to a

guidance counselor in the latter half of his junior year, but called the experience “perfunctory.” He was a bit reluctant to talk with a guidance counselor, “I always thought the guidance counselor was just for people who were always in trouble – like with behavioral problems... I didn’t know that the guidance counselor was actually going to try and guide you through your educational process.” Todd also characterizes the sentiment of other participants in that guidance was a “sorting out,” process with those with “the kids who weren’t getting good grades or weren’t interested in academics. They would steep them toward the industrial arts.” The female participants also felt they received more guidance about possible careers in the home economics and “business” classes (classes which were described as developing clerical and bookkeeping skills with typing and shorthand being major components of the class).

While several participants talked about informal conversations with their teachers about college, often this talk was put in the context of needing a certain kind of math for college. Participants saw themselves and their parents as needing to independently navigate the admissions process and financial aid complexities of college. In this group, Michelle, who received help from the secretary in the guidance office, was the exception. This echoes Michelle’s discussion of supportive networks of adults in the community.

While participants did not remember career exploration activities, two participants had experiences that would ultimately shape what they would do for a career. Michelle was approached by the secretary in the guidance office about an experience called the Junior Board of Directors, sponsored by a local bank. She interviewed and was chosen for this position where students from Park High and neighboring schools would meet and

discuss banking and the financial world. Michelle recalls, “So, I think of that as one program that was provided in the community and really worked with the high school...it kind of opened my eyes up a little bit more – it planted kind of an opportunity for exploring the banking business.” Patience, too, described working for “the juvenile probation officer in town, under a Job Service job-training type program, or a work experience program.” While much of the work she did was filing and typing, “Probably that’s where the light went on for me, as far as the criminal justice thing and working with at-risk youth...”

2005-2015. In the 2005-2015 generational group, Callie, as well as other participant’s recall group guidance meetings to talk about college or financial assistance. Callie remembers one group meeting of seniors:

...but they didn’t individually bring you in or have you come in and discuss what you wanted to do afterwards with them. So, I think they touched on it because they have to – as a senior in high school...but it definitely wasn’t pushed very hard at all. (Callie, Class of 2009)

While Constance did have a relationship with a counselor she saw as being “very attentive,” and helped her sort out different options that might be available to her, she, and Callie both describe almost identically that they were frustrated by the college application and financial aid admissions process and the accompanying paperwork. While Constance’s difficulty was that she planned to pay for college herself had she gone, she was still required to give information about her parents, as they had previously declared her as a dependent on their tax return. Callie again describes her experience:

You know it was hard coming out of Park High. I didn’t know anything about what I wanted to do. I didn’t have a clear push as to colleges and things like that. I don’t think I ever had anybody help me write letters to

colleges or anything if I wanted to go. I don't think they ever gave me that option. I know at some schools if you need help applying to a college, they're all for it, and I know that the [Park High] counselors just don't do that...So, me being totally naïve to that – you know I didn't know how to apply to college in the first place – and I think that was part of the reason I took time off from school. I didn't even know how to apply for college, and the online thing was easier for me to apply to... (Callie, Class of 2009)

Sometime after 2010, the situation at Park High appears to have shifted, with participants having made connections with guidance counselors, teachers, or the academic dean (a position that had not existed previously) about the transition past high school. Both Pecos Bill and Seth, though, who did not intend to pursue a four-year college, voiced the following frustration that college was too heavily emphasized. For Seth, in response to the question 'Do you remember talking with any guidance counselors or teachers about what some of your choices were after high school?':

Yeah, Guidance counselors – for the most part, everybody except Mrs. X [guidance counselor] – wanted to push college. College applications, college this, college that. And they don't want you to really say, 'Hey, I don't want to go to college.' They don't want to take that as an answer. Everybody had to fill out the FAFSA financial aid and all of that. Even before that I already knew I wasn't going to college, so there was no point in me filling that out. (Seth, Class of 2014)

When the researcher asked Seth about the guidance counselor he referred to he responded, "Well, she pushed it, but she would listen to the other side of it, too. She was another person that I would actually be able to talk to outside of school."

Pecos Bill described the same counselor who helped him find a two-year technical college (whose tagline on their website is "start here – go anywhere") after a medical condition ruled out the armed forces as a path after high school graduation.

She brought me in the office between classes and says, ‘Ooh, I found a good school for you....and it’s in this state.’ She set up the interview with the guy – with the tour guide over there, and me and my Mom went over there – did the tour and found out that the school looked pretty promising, so I went to that school. (Pecos Bill, Class of 2013)

Kristen remembered forming a relationship with the academic dean after she was put on academic probation for athletics. As the procedure in the school was to continue to have students check in to help them to make sure they were still on track, Kristen recounts, “So I had to do checks and everything every now and then...but I think Mrs. Z still asked and wanted to know what’s going on – she still does when I see her [since graduation].”

Dominic and Kristen had career internships with professionals in the fields they thought they might want to pursue. While Kristen found the experience to be helpful, and helped to solidify her path into college, Dominic described that much of the work he performed was clerical in nature, and he did not learn more about the profession. Pecos Bill and Seth always had jobs they had lined up themselves throughout high school and did not pursue the career exploration program at the school.

To summarize, for the 1985-1995 generational group, in the area of how participants perceived that the school assisted them in transitioning post-high school, there was not as much assistance that originated with the high school for making the transition from high school as there was available for the 2005-2015 group. While some participants in the older group felt that college was not emphasized enough, there were participants in the younger group who felt that college was overemphasized. In both groups, parent assistance was paramount in helping students who intended to go to college. In the 2005-2015 group, after around 2010, the high school appeared to offer

more assistance about the college admission and financial assistance process. As well, five of six participants had relationships with school personnel who might provide assistance.

Advice to my High School.

The final two questions of the interview were, “If you could do high school all over again, is there anything you would want the high school to do differently?” and “In looking back, are there other ways you feel the school could have been more helpful to you as you transitioned from high school?” These questions were asked in order to both explore topics that had not been discussed and to allow participants to add to topics we had covered.

1985-1995. Seven of the eight participants in the 1985-1995 generational group talked about the importance of a form of student/teacher or student/counselor relationship that would allow students feel known and feel that they one have a school person to help them figure out where they were going after school and how they would get there. Sally described the importance of guidance “...to help me to find my path. Open up my eyes...at the very beginning, freshman year.” She would have liked to have understood how leadership, involvement, and extracurricular activities would “pay off for you in the end.” Michelle echoed Sally, urging the school to find a way to “help ensure student understand the value of an education.” To illustrate her point, Michelle went on to describe a layoff and reorganization situation in her company that occurred a few years previously. All employees were first given a layoff notice, but then positions were re-

opened and people could reapply if they met the qualifications described. Michelle recalls,

...when they re-opened the job – they required a college degree. So instantly, a lot of people were not eligible because of that. They could still apply, but the likelihood of them being really offered a position then was reduced. And even people that had an English degree – it didn't matter what your degree was in, as long as you had a degree, you were in the pool of [those] eligible to apply for a position...in the business world, it can be really mean, and it's not a given that you're going to have the job you want without it [a college education.] (Michelle, Class of 1985)

Robin's advice was that students should have individual guidance time once a month, while Michelle thought that the school should stay connected with students who have graduated, but take time off before going to college so that they are not facing the process alone. Patience advised that the focus of the school should be on one's individual strengths. Let them explore career paths and build on their strengths. Patience also cautioned against reliance on standardized testing, stating, "Don't use the same measuring stick for everybody – it doesn't work." Todd, who did not use his degree after college, instead joining the family construction business reflected:

...not that I wasted money in college, but I don't know...It would be interesting if I'd of had more guidance in high school. More of like somebody really, really sticking you in the corner and saying, 'What do you think you really, really want to do?' instead of just, 'Oh you're going to college.' (Todd, Class of 1989)

Todd went on to describe how if someone had helped him figure out his interests and pointed him to professional possibilities in the same field in which he currently works, this could have made a significant difference in his life, as he still experiences himself searching for his life's work.

Todd and three other participants wished there would have been additional opportunities to explore career paths in high school, especially for those who are on a path to college. “Even if they know you’re going to go to college, just to get you thinking about that sooner than the end of your freshman or sophomore year in college. It would just be good to think about.” Wyatt suggested that instead of guidance counselors, school should have career counselors. Radar, who has a growing company, discussed the technology boom that is going on in neighboring Bozeman, and thought that this, coupled with Montana State University’s engineering program, could provide good career options for students in Livingston, enabling them to stay in the community.

2005-2015. While the 1985-1995 group responded from the vantage of being out of high school for 20-30 years, the 2005-2015 generational group responded with more specific advice for their alma mater. Callie echoed the 1985-1995 group with her advice to:

...push a little harder to get kids to go to college.... Even if they can’t afford it, somehow helping them find ways financially, or things like that. Because I think if someone is a smart kid and they want to go to school, but they can’t afford to, they should still be able to [go]. (Callie, Class of 2009)

While Seth advised that the school should be more open to one’s individual paths, and it should be careful not to push college if that’s not where a student wants to go.

Five participants had advice regarding expanded course offerings. Two discussed adding additional challenging classes and advanced placement type classes. Dominic would like to see additional world language classes. Half of the participants called for a

personal finance type course. Constance thought that personal finance should be a mandatory class. She tells:

I saw so many of my classmates come out of high school and not know how to balance a checkbook. They had no idea how to manage their own finances.... I feel that a lot of people were really unprepared for that. With me, my dad put a lot of emphasis on my learning how to do that, so I took personal finance classes and I took accounting classes. And I was still blindsided by the reality of it I guess, which is something that can only be gained through experience, but I do think that a lot of people were very unprepared for leaving that structured environment. (Constance, Class of 2008)

Kristen echoed Constance's thoughts when she talked about what she needed in this area:

Something to kind of get you prepared for getting thrown into the adult life a little bit better...I would have taken that class, because I still don't know what taxes are and how to do them. I know a little bit about loans now, just because I have loans in my name and all that. But I don't know how to balance a checkbook. I know somewhat about the difference between a savings and a checking account. The basics – [I've got] just enough to say that I know them, but not enough to understand really what I'm doing with it. Maybe budgeting – that's my biggest thing. Maybe what to budget for and what not? (Kristen, Class of 2013)

Pecos Bill had a bit of a different twist on the components of a "real world" class, where in addition to topics discussed by Kristen for the class, he smiled and added:

It would teach you how to change your tire – because it's unbelievable how many times I've had to stop since high school to help, even a guy – I had to stop to help a guy change his tire because he didn't know where his jack-stand was in his car or his hood. And it's just a class like that, that would actually get you ready for the real world. (Pecos Bill, Class of 2013)

Constance, who had liked one principal and clashed with another one, offered a student perspective on her experience of the effect of transient leadership at the high school, after describing a negative experience with one of principals.

I had three principals through my four years of high school. It was a very turbulent time. There seemed to not be much organization. I think leadership has a lot to do with the way you can get kids to react to their education system – because there are some kids that hate school and they hate going every day, whether it's because they don't have friends, or school is hard – so any little thing that can make it just a little bit easier and make them want to go to school is a big thing. I think leadership has a lot to do with that. (Constance, Class of 2008)

In summary, the advice given by participants to their high school from their current realities of life differed by generational group. The 1985-1995 group's advice primarily had to do with providing more individualized connections between guidance counselors or teachers with students, as well as offering more career exploration opportunities to students as they made their way past high school. For the 2005-2015 generational group, the bulk of the advice given was in regard to, as Kristen called it, *getting thrown into adult life* and attempting to navigate the vagaries of figuring out how to support one's self when one is cut loose from the structures of family and K-12 schooling.

Four factors and supporting data have been identified as having an influence on participants as they transitioned from high school. The factors identified are parent expectations for their child's future, involvement in community and school activities and how these social networks operated as participants found their path. A third factor identified is that of the role of the high school in helping students transition. The final factor, which permeates the other three factors, is that of a family's financial stability. The next section closes the results chapter by answering the research questions. This section closes with a comment made by Jim, as he finished giving his advice to his high

school. Jim's family moved their home to Burlington, Iowa when his father transferred with BN. He reflected:

You know, I guess if there was one thing to pick, I guess in some ways I may have picked that we never had to leave Livingston, as a function of the railroad. I have kind of thought back and thought, 'Would I have left Montana if that hadn't occurred?' I kind of think maybe not. (Jim, Class of 1986)

Answering the Research Questions

First Research Question

The first research question is: Immediately after the deindustrialization of a rural community: (a) What were the factors from outside the school that influenced the path from high school to college and work?; (b) How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work?; (c) What were the school-based factors that influenced the path from high school to college and work?, and (d) How did those school-based factors influence the path from high school to college and work?

Factors Outside the School Immediately After Deindustrialization.

The results from this ethnographic case study indicate that for the 1985-1995 generational group that followed the pullout of the Burlington Northern in Livingston, Montana, the non-school-based factors that influenced the path from high school to work were (1) parent expectations of educational attainment and achievement, (2) level of community involvement and support of social networks, and (3) the financial stability of the family.

Theme One – Do Something Besides Beat Up Your Body. How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work? How these factors influenced the path from high school may be best illustrated in the themes that emerged. While nearly all parents of participants in the study conveyed high expectations for academic performance as measured by grades, homework completion, and educational attainment, this generational group was able to meet those expectations. The first theme that emerges is *Do something besides beat up your body*, as Todd put it, as he recounted his father's advice to him for getting a college education. Parent expectations for the participants in this generational group, and participants' expectations for themselves was one of hope, that they might go on to have a better life than their parents. Three of the mothers in this group had college educations and had worked as teachers, so were invested in the possibility of education.

Theme Two – College as an Investment. A second non-school based theme that emerged which was of significance as participants made the path from high school for the 1985-1995 group is named *College as an investment*. This theme is also conveyed in the epigraph from archival interviews that introduces Chapter Two in this study (Keffer, 1998). In addition to not beating up one's body, as Radar conveyed, college was seen as an opportunity, one that had not been so readily available to his parents. For participants in this group, higher education was seen as a way to find financial stability and security in the job market. Of specific interest is that several participants did not have an idea of their career path, or, for a few, struggled in college with grades and motivation, yet continued on with their degree. For the 2005-2015 group, exploring majors in college

would be an expensive luxury that comes with the price of school loan debt. In both generational groups, 13 of 14 participants relayed that their parents experienced financial stress, yet the magnitude of that stress appears to be different for both groups, with Jim referring to family vacations, and Todd referring to ski equipment as an incentive for good grades, while for some in the 2005-2015 group, home foreclosure or lack of health insurance is discussed. Finally, for this generational group, there is a clear indication of family financial planning and preparation as families prepared for college. Wyatt sold his 4-H pigs, and although Sally's parents took out loans, they knew what they could afford to do, for example, pay for in-state college only.

Theme Three – Surrounded by Community. A third theme that emerges, and is both a school and a non-school-based factor has to do with the level of community involvement and support of social networks. This theme is called, as Michelle referred to it, *Surrounded by community*. In the 1985-1995 generational group, seven of eight participants had high levels of involvement in community activities, compared to one participant in the 2005-2015 group. For those whose families left Livingston, transferring to positions in Glendive, Montana or Burlington, Iowa, this move, in Patience's words, "shattered" her family. "It fractured the home base I had." For the 1985-1995 group, there was a more diverse network of support in both the community and the family. Sally described her involvement with church activities and doing volunteer work with her mother, while Radar and Michelle described the influence of their community mentors as they explored career choices. The theme of *Surrounded by community* is augmented by those interviewed in the pilot study, as well as by archival

data (Whithorn, 2013; Keffer, 1998). Neighborhood cohesion, involvement in church and community groups, and union cohesion were discussed as that which brought community members together.

Path from High School to College and Work. The results from this ethnographic case study indicate that for the 1985-1995 generational group that followed the pullout of the Burlington Northern in Livingston, Montana, the school-based factors that influenced the path from high school to work were (1) involvement with school activities, (2) the view of one's self as a student and (3) teachers' expectations of students.

Theme Three (continued) - Surrounded by Community

How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work? In looking at how school-based factors influenced the path from high school we continue with the third theme *Surrounded by community*, which captures both school and non-school based influences as this generational group made its way from high school. Jim described how the belonging to and success of his basketball team had the effect of raising his confidence as a student. For Radar and Wyatt, their involvements in school were both formal and informal. Radar described the teacher who brought books about hiking and mountain climbing after hearing students talk about their interests, going outside his role as teacher. Todd described the Park High teachers who also led his youth group and took the time to engage him in conversations about his future.

Theme Four – In the Name of my Future Self

The fourth theme that emerged in the 1985-1995 generational group which influenced the transition from high school is that of envisioning one's future and then doing what it takes to reach one's goals, or in Robin's words, *In the name of my future self*. Teachers who recognized their aptitudes, participants who did not try as hard as they might have, are encompassed in this theme. This also encompasses how negative experiences motivated some participants in a sub-theme called *In spite of*.

In the name of my future self refers to that as children are growing up, there is much that we ask them to learn, to pay attention to, to apply themselves to which may not have meaning to them in that moment. How many times are teachers asked, "Why do I have to learn this?" and how many times do students say to themselves (or to their teachers) "I'll never use this." As Robin stated, in high school, "it's hard to see the bigger picture." This is especially the case as a student moves through school, as content and thinking require a higher level of concentration and focus. To do well with learning subject matter or a skill that one is not particularly interested in at the onset requires some level of trust or faith in the adult, in the school system, or in oneself that this effort will be worth it because it is done *In the name of my future self*, or it requires a wanting to please another. (This is even more complicated and difficult for those who suffer traumas, as in 'D' in the pilot study who dropped out of high school twice, mainly due to an accumulation of stressors and a traumatic event he experienced as an adolescent.) For those students in the 1985-1995 generational group, participants felt most positively influenced by those teachers they felt recognized them as individuals and would take time to listen, consider them, and know

when to push and when to pull, as Sally put it. Radar got a sense of performing *In the name of my future self* when a teacher encouraged him and friends to take an advanced placement test in a subject area in which he had not taken the course, much less the AP course. Teachers who were excited about the content they taught also had a contagious and influential effect on students. In both groups, though not with all participants, there is evidence of trusting, working relationships between participants and teachers, as they described what teachers value, be that honesty, commitment, or pushing one's boundaries.

Sub-theme - In spite of. *In spite of* is an indicator of resilience and fortitude, using one's anger and doubt to move through the obstacle. The most egregious *In spite of* experience occurred for Patience whose guidance counselor moved from encouraging her to firmly discouraging her when her SAT scores indicated that she may not have the intellect to do well in college. As well, Patience and Radar describe academic achievement obstacles, which for Radar, persisted through college, and for Patience, started as a young girl, which she conquered as she made her way through college, then going on for her Master's Degree.

In summary, the four overarching themes that exemplify how school and non-school-based factors influenced the transition from high school for those students from the 1985-1995 generation group, immediately after deindustrialization of a rural community was discussed. Those outside of school-based themes are: (1) *Do something besides beat up your body* and (2) *College as an investment*, and (3) *Surrounded by community*, which pertains to community activities and mentors. School-based themes are: (3) *Surrounded*

by community, which pertains to school activities and mentors, and (4) *In the name of my future self* and the sub-theme *In spite of*.

Second Research Question

The second research question is: In the 20-30 years (distantly after) following the deindustrialization of a rural community: (a) What were the factors from outside the school that influenced the path from high school to college and work?; (b) How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work?; (c) What were the school-based factors that influenced the path from high school to college and work?, and (d) How did those school-based factors influence the path from high school to college and work?

Factors from Outside School 20-30 Years After Deindustrialization

For the 2005-2015 generational group, results indicate that for these participants from working class families living in deindustrialized community, the most significant non-school based factors that influenced their post-high school past were the (1) financial stability of the family and (2) parent expectations.

Theme One – Getting Thrown into Adult Life. How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work? The ways in which the non-school-based factors operated are more complex for the group that followed a generation after deindustrialization. While parental expectations were high for the 2005-2015 group, as they were for the 1985-1995 group, financial stability and

financial stress were material barriers with participants struggling to figure out how much more stress and debt they were willing to inflict on their parents. This first theme is characterized by Kristen's comment *Getting thrown into adult life*, which characterizes how families' financial situations influenced decisions made as participants graduated from high school. The second theme that emerges is *College is a gamble*, which captures the interplay of financial stress with parental expectations for educational attainment.

While 13 of the 14 participants in this case study saw their parents as struggling economically, there is a notable difference in the form of their descriptions. Sally, from the 1985-1995 group described that she was not aware of her parent's financial stress, she only knew in retrospect that "things were tight." Conversely, a participant in this group describes that even though her parents got their bills paid on time, she described her parents fighting "a lot through high school. We heard the arguments – the fights – and it always started with money." Of the six participants in the 2005-2015, two discussed having mothers who had significant health issues as they grew up, with one caring for her siblings starting at a young age. A third participant recalled a parent's health problems and loss of health insurance at around the time she graduated from high school. A fourth participant described his family nearly losing their home and a fifth described working to make the mortgage payment when he was in high school. There is not a sense, in these participant descriptions, of being kept from, or sheltered from the financial fragility and stress that their parents were experiencing. This describes *Getting thrown into adult life*. When the researcher asked Seth if he was worried about making the mortgage payment,

his demeanor was one of pride and assurance as he answered, “Not once. I had a stable job.” Participants in this group, when asked how the type of work done by their parents influenced them as they transitioned from high school, spoke of the work ethic and their parents’ willingness to support them, for one, “even if my dad had to sell our house,” so that they could go to college.

Getting Thrown into Adult Life. For the 2005-2015 group is also reflected in comments related to graduating from high school and feeling “blindsided” and unprepared to leave the structure of high school and family. While half of parents in each generational groups voiced their desire for their children to go to on to college, in the earlier group three of four participants fulfilled these expectations, compared to none of the participants in the 2005-2015 group fulfilling their expectations for educational attainment. Two participants who saw themselves on a path to college, with parents willing to financially support them, knowing what they knew of their parents’ financial reality, having been *Thrown into adult life*, made the decision to not pursue a four-year college. For these participants, one has not pursued education past high school at this point, and the other, went the route of an online college.

Theme Two – College is a Gamble. The second theme, *College is a gamble* interplays with *Getting thrown in adult life*, as described above. The 2005-2015 group demonstrated a high level of concern about whether or not the cost of higher education is worth the sacrifice. While Dominic sees education and learning for the sheer joy of it, the other five participants felt they did not have the luxury of exploring what they might

do for a career while burdening themselves with debt. Participants questioned whether the cost of college was worth the burden of debt, especially when they saw family members and friends go to school for a time, then leave with debt. This finding is bolstered by Montana Office of Public Instruction Reports and Data (n.d.) and PHS archival data (Park High School Profile, n.d.) regarding college enrollment of PHS students after high school. This has also been observed by the researcher in both informal observations and discussion over the past four years, and in focus groups with parents. Two participants, referring to themselves as middle class, voiced that they were “too rich” for non-debt accumulating financial assistance, but “too poor” to afford college. *College is a gamble* in a rural community, where jobs that allow for upward economic mobility are scarce, as Seth saw when he saw his father not use his college degree, commenting, “That really kind of opened my eyes to the fact that you can be successful without going to college.” It is of note that in this generational group, there is less community and church involvement, and fewer community-based mentors, thus narrowing social networks. This is confirmed by observational data with those in the faith communities who have discussed the lack of youth involvement in church groups.

School-Based Factors

The school-based factors that most significantly influenced the path from high school for the 2005-2015 generational group were (1) assistance in making the transition from high school to college and work; (2) school mentors, and (3) teachers’ expectations of students.

Theme Three – a Real World Class. How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work? The third theme that characterizes how school-based factors influenced the path from high school for the 2005-2015 generational group is named by Pecos Bill, we need *A real-world class* [course]. When participants of this group thought about teachers who influenced them positively and what qualities those teachers valued that helped as they made the transition from high school, while somewhat similar to the 1985-1995 group, gaining confidence from teachers who saw them as unique people and took an interest in them, most participants valued those teachers who valued the skills, knowledge and attitudes they would need to be successful in the workforce. This is characterized by a participant who credited his Career and Technical Education teachers for “mentally and physically preparing me for the workforce.” Another spoke of those who helped her with organizational and time management skills. These participants valued their own work ethic and were working to figure out how to manage their finances.

In the same vein, this group, in giving advice to their high school, advised that *A real world class*, one that would assist with personal finance and making the physical and life transition from high school. While the years a young adult spends in college serves as a bridge between adolescence and adulthood, with young men and women still safely, if not impatiently tethered to the institutions of family and school, those who enter the workforce immediately after high school, supporting themselves financially, are “freed,” but lose the structure these institutions provide. Two participants in this general group labeled this experience as being “blindsided” and not prepared for adulthood.

Participants thought that if the school could offer classes or programs that would help them make this bridge, this transition might be smoother.

Theme Four – I’ve Found a College for You. The fourth theme is again provided by Pecos Bill and is called *I’ve found a college for you*, this reference being made by his guidance counselor after he was turned down by the military. The counselor then arranged to have this generational group relied more heavily on school personnel, mainly teachers and guidance counselors, to assist them helping to figure out what their next steps past high school might be. While the participants who graduated before 2010 did not feel that college was emphasized enough, some in the younger group felt that college was overemphasized. Five of the six participants had relationships and had met with school personnel who provided assistance about the path from high school. Further, while half of both generational groups had adults they considered to be school mentors, for this group, there were no community or church mentors and their level of community involvements were less. While four of the six participants in the generational group are critical of the school for a variety of reasons: lack of challenging courses, over or underemphasizing college, transient leadership, spending too many hours on homework after a shift at work, and lack of individual attention, there is also a sense of the familial in the interviews, for example, how Callie described her guidance counselor as “very attentive” and Pecos Bill, Seth, Kristen, and Dominic described their relationships with counselors and teachers. Pecos described a contentious relationship with a teacher that “leveled out” as he moved into his last years. “We figured out which buttons not to push on each other. For example, with Mr. X, do not bring up anything disrespecting Obama.”

In summary, the four overarching themes that exemplify how school and non-school-based factors influenced the transition from high school for those students from the 2005-2015 generational group, immediately after deindustrialization of a rural community was discussed. Those outside of school-based themes are: (1) *Getting thrown into adult life* and (2) *College is a gamble*, and (3) School-based themes are: (3) *A real world class* and (4) *I've found a college for you*.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the ethnographic case study that examined school and non-school based factors that influence the transition from high school to work and college. Two generational groups were interviewed: the first, alumni of a high school of a small rural city who graduated in the decade that followed deindustrialization. The second group was comprised of alumni of the same school who graduated a generation, or 20-30 years later, between 2005 and 2015. The final chapter presents discussion and implications.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of the final chapter is to reflect upon and discuss the findings of this ethnographic case study. The chapter is organized first by a review of the intent of the study, and then a review of the methodology and results. This is followed by a discussion of the finding and implications and insights, particularly for school leadership teams. The study concludes with recommendations for further research.

Background and Intent of the Study

Public high schools in the United States have been charged with preparing students for both citizenship and so that they have the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary for success in postsecondary education and economically viable career pathways in a 21st century economy. This study attempts to understand how students prepare for college and work in a rural, deindustrialized working-class community where jobs and careers that allow for upward economic mobility are scarce and the purpose for education beyond high school is not seen.

This ethnographic case study sought to identify and to understand the interplay of school-based and non-school-based factors that influenced high school students' decisions as they graduated and made the transition from school to college and work. Two generational groups of alumni from working class families in the same high school

were studied. The first group was comprised of those who graduated from Park High School in the decade that followed the closure of the Burlington Northern railroad in Livingston, Montana in 1985. The second group was comprised of those who graduated a generation later, between the years of 2005-2015, 20-30 years after deindustrialization.

The study originates from the everyday work of the researcher who, at the time of the study had been the principal of the high school at the center of this study for four years and a resident of the community for a decade. Alumni from Park High School in Livingston, Montana are the participants in the study. Livingston, Montana is classified by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2015) as a remote town. As both participant and observer, the researcher had been attempting to understand the factors that influenced how students made decisions about what they might do and where they might go after high school. As well, as the faculty of the high school worked on internal redesign of the high school model, they took up the notion of how to best “launch” students into their futures and what that might mean in a community that had deindustrialized a generation ago and was economically still finding its way in a state where mining, logging, and oil booms came and went.

The intent of the study, from the perspective of the school leader, was to understand how both school and non-school factors influenced decisions made and the choices that students felt they had for two generations of students from working class families as they made their transition from high school and into young adulthood. By better understanding the differences and similarities from one generation to the next, high

school leadership teams may be able to better assist students for their next steps into college and work in rural, deindustrialized working-class communities.

Review of the Methodology

The methodology chosen to answer the research questions in this project was that of an ethnographic case study. An ethnographic approach was chosen in order to understand, from an insider's perspective, a group that shared the same culture (Yin, 1994; Cresswell, 2007). A case study design was chosen in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within a bounded setting (Merriam, 1998). The study focused on an event that occurred in the rural community, first of gradual and then abrupt deindustrialization in 1985 as the Burlington Northern Railroad shops closed in Livingston, Montana. The primary instrument used for data collection was interviews. Secondary instruments included artifacts, in the form of school archival data, government reports and historical documents, as well as observations. As Merriam (1998) discusses, the design of case study is appropriate when the intention of the researcher is to uncover the interaction of factors that are characteristic of the phenomenon. In this case, the phenomena examined are the school-based and non-school based factors that influenced the transition from high school to career and work in a community that underwent deindustrialization.

The two groups that made up the case were those alumni who graduated from Park High School who had primary guardians who did not graduate from college. All alumni described themselves as average or above average students. This study is bounded

by two time periods: the decade that immediately followed deindustrialization (1985-1995) and a generation later, in the most recent decade (2005-2015), the decade that distantly follows deindustrialization. This case study is heuristic in that it leads to insights into how situations develop over time, namely how two generations of students approached the transition from high school. The study also seeks to inform those who work inside the educational institution, therefore the use of thick descriptions, which is an essential feature of a qualitative study, helped to uncover and understand complex relations (Merriam, 1998; Smith, 2005).

The fourteen Park High School alumni interviewed participated in semi-structured, digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed sessions ranging from 45 to 90 minutes. Purposeful sampling was used in order to enable the researcher to select participants who could help the researcher understand more about the situation. While a snowball sampling strategy was used at the start of the interview selection process, as the study progressed maximum variation sampling was used in order to attain a wide range of graduation years within each generational group, and to achieve a gender balance. Interviews occurred within a three-month period of time in 2015. A pilot study consisting of four participants was done in July and August of 2015. These participants graduated between the years of 1969-1999. One participant in the pilot study dropped out of school, but would have graduated in 1995. The pilot study interviews resulted in a more focused and specific interview protocol and helped determine the time frame to be studied.

The purpose of the interview was not simply to collect information about the participant's experiences of growing up and transitioning from high school to adult, but was also an attempt to explicate the social relations among the participant, the school, the family and other social networks of support at work in the community. Each participant who agreed to do so was sent a transcribed interview with an invitation to clarify, add, or make corrections. While interviews were the primary strategy used to collect data, observation and artifact analysis, in the form of school and government reports, archival data and historical documents, were also utilized. The interview questions were initially drawn from the research of Dr. Jennifer Silva both in telephone consultation and e-mail correspondence beginning in March, 2015, in her ethnography *Coming Up Short: Working Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* (2013) and in her work with Dr. Robert Putnam in *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (2015).

The data were first reduced to units and then were constructed into categories. The four factors (or categories) that emerged were then grouped into themes for each generational group as shown in the following table.

The interviews were given to two readers, long-time residents of Livingston, one, an educator and the other a non-educator professional. Readers were used to test emergent themes. Themes were also tested informally with the researcher's principal advisory council, two groups of high school students, which are composed of a cross-section of students in the high school from the graduating classes of 2016-2019. The following section includes the flow of data from categories to themes.

Table 18. School and Non-School Based Factors That Influenced Post-High School Graduation Decisions.

	Factor	Comprised of:
Factor One	Parent expectations	• Homework and grades • Educational attainment
Factor Two	Financial stability	• The railroad • The influence of parents' work • Financial stress • Financing college
Factor Three	Community and school involvement and social networks	• Involvement in community and school activities • School and community mentors • Ties to the community
Factor Four	High school	• View of self as a student • What teachers value • Assistance in making the transition • Advice to my high school

Discussion of the Findings

The first research question was: Immediately after the deindustrialization of a rural community: (a) What were the factors from outside the school that influenced the path from high school to college and work?; (b) How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work?; (c) What were the school-based factors that influenced the path from high school to college and work?, and (d) How did those school-based factors influence the path from high school to college and work?

The second research question was: In the 20-30 years (distantly after) following the deindustrialization of a rural community: (a) What were the factors from outside the school that influenced the path from high school to college and work?; (b) How did those factors from outside the school influence the path from high school to college and work?;

(c) What were the school-based factors that influenced the path from high school to college and work?, and (d) How did those school-based factors influence the path from high school to college and work?

Table 19. 1985-1995 Factors from outside of school immediately after deindustrialization.

Themes	Factors	Units
<i>Do something besides beat up your body</i>	Parent expectations of educational achievement Parent expectations of educational attainment	Includes parent expectations for educational effort, educational achievement, homework completion, expectations for grades
<i>College as an investment</i>	The financial stability of the family Family planning in making the transition past high school	Includes level of financial stress in the family, family financial planning for college, the influence of parent work, the railroad

Table 20. 1985-1995 School-based factors immediately after deindustrialization.

Themes	Factors	Units
Surrounded by community (both school and non-school based factor)	Involvement in school and community activities School and community mentors	Includes ties to the community
In the name of my future self	Envisioning one's future Educator expectations and excitement about content	Includes assistance in making the transition, view of self as a student, what teachers value
Sub-theme: In spite of	Relationships with adults inside the school	

Table 21. 2005-2015 Factors from outside of school distantly after deindustrialization.

Themes	Factors	Units
<i>Getting thrown into adult life</i>	Family financial stress	Includes financing college, financial realities
<i>College is a gamble</i>	Parent expectations for educational attainment Family financial stress	Includes financing college, ties to the community, community mentors and social networks

Table 22. 2005-2015 School-based factors distantly after deindustrialization.

Themes	Factors	Units
<i>A real-world class</i>	View of self as a student What teachers value Financial stress	Includes financing college, financial realities, and advice in making the transition
<i>I've found a college for you</i>	Assistance in making the transition past high school School mentors	Includes financing college, ties to the community

Findings by Generational Groups

Themes from 1985-1995

As all participants discussed how they made their transition past high school, there are many similarities and palpable differences between the two generations. The 1985-1995 group, in spite of the lived effects of the railroad closure for some, had a sense of hope for their future economic prospects. While deindustrialization was occurring in the mid-west in the 1970's (Bensman and Lynch, 1987), Livingston remained somewhat insulated from this until 1985-1986 with the BN shutdown. For those transitioning past high school in the 1985-1995 generational group and for the parents of the 2005-2015 generational group, there is an expressed desire, for the most part, for their children to get an education past high school. The theme *Do something besides beat up your body* expresses a hope by both parents and participants that education past high school increased one's economic prospects. There is also the hope expressed by the 1985-1995 group in the theme *College as an investment* that they could envision financial stability for themselves and that education past high school would bring that stability. While four of the eight participants currently do not work in the fields in which they were educated for in college, and another two of the eight worked in other fields before finding work in

their degree area in this area of the state, all saw college as having been a good investment in their futures, even though several did not enter college with a clear picture of their career path. For the 1985-1995 generational group, there is evidence of financial planning for college, even if the participants were to take on the financing of their education.

In the 1985-1995 generational group, most of the participants had social networks that consisted of both strong and weak ties. Strong ties included close families and friends and weak ties, the non-kin, acquaintance-type networks that, while not as reliable as strong ties, are important for social mobility and economic advancement. This, as well as involvement in school activities make up the theme of *Surrounded by community*, and were influential in how participants made decisions about their next steps past high school. From the success of the basketball team to the youth group mentors from the church, there are thick descriptions in the interview data of participants having adults in their lives with whom they could talk about their futures in both formal and informal ways.

Finally, for the 1985-1995 group, the theme *In the name of my future self* and the sub-theme *In spite of*, teachers who knew when to push and when to pull, who got to know them individually, who took an interest in them, had an influence on how participants envisioned themselves as students and gave them a sense of their capacities. While these experiences were characterized by trusting working relationships between participants and educators, the sub-theme *In spite of* had to do with using one's anger and doubt to move through negative experiences. *In spite of* a father who did not see the

point of a daughter going on to an out-of-state college and *in spite of* a counselor who told a student she did not have the aptitude to go on to college after a poor test performance, participants spoke of these experiences as galvanizing their resolve to prove the naysayers wrong.

Themes from 2005-2015

The 2005-2015 generational group, while displaying many similarities in the areas of parent expectations for homework, grades and hopes for educational attainment and in aspects of high school such as the how they viewed themselves as students and in their shared views of what teacher's value in students, there are also distinct differences. One of the readers of the interviews for this study commented that the railroad seemed to have protected Livingston through the 1970's and into the 1980's, continuing to supply opportunities in the decade beyond the recessions that are associated with deindustrialization of steel, rubber, electrical appliances, machine tools, automobiles, and auto parts (Bensman and Lynch, 1987) in the United States. This is seen in the optimism of those who graduated in the 1985-1995 generational group. Now, with the Great Recession of 2007-2009 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) also dealing a blow to the economy, the lack of opportunity for recent graduates is more evident.

The non-school based factors of *Getting thrown into adult life* and *College is a gamble* both strongly influence the decisions made and the choices participants believe they had as they graduated from high school for the 2005-2015 group. *Getting thrown into adult life* characterizes how financial situations influenced next steps. Even for those participants who intended to go to college and whose parents had voiced their willingness

to pay for college, the students recognized the financial reality of their parents and decided on a different path. Leaving the structure of the family and of school then, *Getting thrown into adult life* is seen in comments like feeling “blindsided” as they moved on past high school. *College is a gamble* interplays with *Getting thrown into adult life*. While participants in the 1985-1995 generational group pursued college to explore possible careers, participants in the 2005-2015 group felt this to be a luxury – a luxury they cannot afford. The prospect of school-loan debt, the financial burden that may be inflicted on parents, the lack of economic opportunities in Livingston, and the fear of failing and self-doubt because one does not have a clear plan for the future is shared in this group. Participants in this group voiced that they were “too rich” for non-debt accumulating financial assistance but “too poor” to afford college. The descriptions of financial stress in the family differed between the two groups. While 13 of 14 participants described their parents as struggling economically, the 2005-2015 group recalls arguments between parents, loss of health insurance, and an inability to pay the mortgage. Conversely, the 1985-1995 group describes financial stress as “things were tight”, or they took fewer vacations.

For the 2005-2015 group, college as a way to bring economic opportunity to one’s life is a non-option as they look around them and see the burden of school loan debt coupled with underemployment. This anxiety is evident in the theme *A real-world class* as participants believe that they could better navigate the transition into adulthood by being better able to manage their finances, say, through a personal finance class, or classes that would help them to be better organized. For this group, while similar to the

1985-1995 group in that the teachers they valued most were those who saw them as unique and who took an interest in them, most participants valued those teachers who valued the skills, knowledge and attitudes they would need to be successful in the workforce.

The 2005-2015 generational group struggled to make sense of the economic realities in which they exist and what appears to be growing poverty within the working class when compared to the 1985-1995 group. Participants expressed frustration with themselves in their thinking that if they had a personal finance course and could be smarter about budgeting their money, then, prospects might be better. Or they expressed frustration with the school, for example, in “overemphasizing” college. Although they consider themselves middle class, one participant expressed how it is only the “rich” who can afford to send their kids out of state for college.

The fourth school-based theme expressed in 2005-2015 group *I’ve found a college for you*, references how this generational group relied more heavily on educators, mainly teachers and guidance counselors in assisting them in figuring out what next steps past high school might be. While half of both generational groups had educators as mentors, for the 2005-2015 group there were no community or church mentors. As well, their level of community involvement was lower. While there is no shortage of criticism for the school for items like students having too much homework after coming home after a shift at work, there is also a sense of the familial in the interviews. The interplay of factors and the two dominant discourses of equality of opportunity and of self-reliance are especially evident in the 2005-2015 group and will be discussed further in the next

section in relationship as insights gained and the implications of the results for a school leadership team is discussed.

Implications and Insights

Leadership success depends on the skill with which leaders adapt their practices to the circumstances in which they find themselves, their understanding of the underlying causes of the problems they encounter, and how they respond to those problems. Research on educational leadership has been relatively inattentive to the relationship between context and effective leadership behavior.

Louis, et al, p 25

Learning from Leadership Exec Summary, July 2010

Why does understanding more about the school and non-school factors at work as students make their transition out of high school matter? In what ways might a school leadership team use this information to assist students, educators and their families? A first point that introduces the following section on Recommendations for Practice serves to remind us of the enormous and complex work of the transformational leader. In Leithwood's (1994) seminal work in developing a model of a transformational leader, an essential transformational leadership practice is that a leader must "explicitly help staff understand the relationship between district and ministry initiatives and the school's vision" (p. 510). Further, a transformational leader, in providing intellectual stimulation, "directly challenges staff's basic assumptions about their work as well as unsubstantiated or questionable beliefs and practices" (p. 511). He goes on to conclude that "perseverating on one or several dimensions of leadership and ignoring the remainder will not get the job done" (p. 514).

This study describes the complex interplay of factors as students move from high school into college and work. For the 2005-2015 group, the financial instability of working class families is inextricably woven into student experiences of schooling and possibilities of educational attainment. If, as school leaders and educators, we go on ignoring the “context” or economic reality in which these students are situated in their lives, but instead continue to echo the message of the equality of opportunity discourse (Blum, 1988) that their hard work and initiative in school is enough to level the playing field so that they may “better themselves” and reach their goals, then we are ignoring their reality and fears of the future and are committing a self-deluding disservice as our students leave the K-12 educational system. The results of this study describe how students are “blindsided” by the reality of entry into an adulthood where graduating from college ends with the possibility of thousands of dollars of school loan debt coupled with underemployment.

This experience of being *thrown into adulthood* has the further repercussion of students blaming the school and/or, worse, themselves, for not preparing them well enough through, say, a personal finance course or better systems for organizing themselves. This adds to the lowered levels of social trust described by Silver (2013) and Putnam (2015). It is the role of school leadership to help staff to examine beliefs and practices that, heretofore have not been grappled with in order to, at best, help students and families look more clearly at the situation in order to find solutions, or at least, so that we do not thwart the initiative and aspirations of those we seek to educate.

A second point that introduces Recommendations for Practice reminds us how bureaucracy, in this case, the institution of public schooling, communicates objectives from the federal to the local level in both direct and indirect ways. As Leithwood (1994) points out, it is also incumbent on school leadership to help staff make sense of federal or state initiatives or practices, particularly when these may be in conflict with local experience. State policy, for the most part, indirectly affects student learning, as it is filtered through local leadership (Firestone, 2009). Achieving consistency and coherence between state and local policies and local initiatives is part of the work of educational leaders (Honig and Hatch, 2004; Morton and Harmon, 2011). At the time of this study, preparing high school students to be college and career ready (CCR) is an articulated federal and state policy initiative. How does school leadership make sense of policy initiatives such as CCR in a rural community?

Results of this study confirm that problems that originate outside of the school, such as the deindustrialization that occurred in this community, cannot be solved inside the school walls. The working class of 1985-1995 who saw college as an investment is not the same working class of 2005-2015 who see college as a gamble. This change was brought about by economic factors beyond the school and community. While the school cannot change economic realities or make state or federal policy decisions, as educators, we have an obligation to intervene, to address individual, immediate issues that affect our students. The next section addresses recommendations for practice based on conclusions from this study, beginning at the relationships level and moving outward to the school

level, rural college and career readiness, the community level, and finally, considerations for school leadership regarding the discourses of equality and self-reliance.

Recommendations for Practice

The economic, social, and political conditions that exist in our world inextricably shape life at the level of the individual. This is patently clear in the results of this study as we listen to capable students, wary of the “gamble” of college, or those who eschew academic or abstract work because it isn’t immediately practical in one’s life, or those who will not burden their already burdened parents and families with talk of tuition, further inflicting additional financial stress upon them. While we are obligated to intervene and have no lack of creative ideas and practices that might be useful for our students, we must not, as educators, delude ourselves into thinking that our solutions will solve social inequalities.

In education, for those of us who are practitioners, we hesitate, and understandably so, to look at our work through the lens of structural inequalities or unequal social structures for which we do not have the power to effect. While we attempt to operate our schools and our classrooms so that our students may experience growth, engagement, and progress, we do not live or educate in a society that operates with this goal of “the good of the all.” As educators, we do not want our students to experience the ravages of poverty, nor do we want them to suffer with the mental illness that comes out of family trauma and addiction. It is painful to witness a child who comes into school, at five, struggling to focus and to eat her lunch because her mouth hurts due to rotting teeth and tender, inflamed gums. It is painful to witness our students turn away from a

classmate who smells bad because his family has not had running water for some number of months. As educators, we do what we can to garner the resources that we ourselves have access to, in order to help with the day-to-day problems of our students so that they may have a chance to know the joy and transcendent experience of learning. We see the problem that is beyond the level of the child and we intervene at an individual level.

The challenge then, as educational leaders, is to attempt to see and consider individuals in the context of the conditions that help shape them, while also working at the level of the individual who is not solely determined by the societal conditions that shape them, but who will hopefully, go after their hopes and dreams and make their own unique way into the world. It is crucial that our practice as educators is informed by the awareness that our students' (as well as our own) subjective experiences of their lives and their world are embedded within economic, political and social structures. If we do not keep this awareness, we reduce our work to student-blaming or parent-blaming, dismissing say, their lack of effort to "he is making a choice" as Silva (2013) discusses. The individual recommendations that follow then should be augmented by the understanding that the unique individuals with whom we work are shaped by and embedded within economic, political, and social structures of our time.

Relationships

Both generational groups described the impact of teachers and school personnel in their lives. For the 2005-2015 group, their reliance upon school personnel is of greater importance as non-kin community ties have been reduced. While the work of Putnam (2015) and Zaff (2003) document the reduction of non-kin ties, a finding of this study of

the increased reliance on school personnel by students, has implications for school practices related to the strengthening of relationships.

- School structures that foster ongoing relationships between teachers and students are important. These relationships, as described in this study, have profound and lasting effects on students and the decisions they make regarding the transition out of high school.
- Expanded training and expanded expectations for high school teachers on helping students envision and plan for post-high school education and training, expanding this work beyond what it takes to get a high school diploma, will help to bolster the planning that is not occurring at the home level (MacTavish and Salamon, 2006).
- A high school diploma should not be seen as an end-goal. Graduation with an executable plan for the next stage of one's education, career or training is the end-goal of high school.
- Efforts to bring integrate community and school will help to augment the crucial "weak" ties of the social network. This can be done through an expanded and/or tiered career internship and career pathway component for all students at the high school level.

Rural College and Career Readiness

Students are considered to be CCR when they graduate with the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary for success in postsecondary education and economically viable career pathways in a 21st century economy. What a viable career pathway is in a

21st century rural economy varies. It likely means leaving the community. It could mean becoming a plumber, entrepreneur, educator, nurse, or carpenter and staying in the community. School leadership need to understand and articulate the conflict between the formal educational discourse and the rural community discourse (Corbett, 2007). For example, while the formal educational discourse sees education as the bridge out of the community (more schooling equals greater earnings and satisfaction), the rural community discourse hopes for its youth to stay in order to enrich and grow the community. Need a rural community always a “talent-extraction industry” as Howley (2009) refers to it?

- In a rural community, a school would do well to clearly address the realities of types of work available in the community, the earning capacity that goes along with the work and the pathways for getting there. As Conley (2014) states, not every student needs the same knowledge and skills to be college and career ready. Assisting students and families in clearly looking at the economic realities in which they live is imperative, both at an instructional level and at a practical level.
- Define and articulate the high school curriculum through career pathways, so that students may understand the jobs that are available with various levels of education or training, for example, with an apprenticeship to an Associates Degree that could lead into a four-year degree could serve to reduce the “risk” that *College is a gamble*.

- Confronting the divide between rural life and rural education (Howley, 2009) through place-based educational practices (Corbett, 2009) and participation of students in envisioning their community's future, for example through encouragement of small-scale enterprises and inventions, utilizing community mentors.
- Offer dual credit courses at high school that are low-cost and that include career and technical education courses as well as academic courses. At Park High School, dual credit courses are currently offered in welding and CAD, and are expanding into other academic areas, with the hope of bridging the path for working class students into further college or training and providing affordable college credit.
- Integrating more academic (abstract) content into career and technical education courses and integrating additional career and skills into academic courses help to blur the lines between the antiquated college versus the trades curriculum.
- At a pedagogical level, the approach of critical pedagogy¹⁴ combined with place-based curriculum (Corbett, 2009) has the potential to be useful for helping students in understanding the connections between their own lived experiences and the social, political and economic contexts in which they live.

¹⁴ In critical pedagogy, teaching and learning occurs in ways in which students are not passive; approaches might include problem posing, dialogue, making persuasive arguments, reasoned critiques of knowledge, and identifying meaningful action (Ryder, n.d.).

Critical pedagogy is an avenue to address both the student and parent resistance to schooling. By articulating, what some in 2005-2015 group spoke of in terms of not valuing that which was not “practical” for life, allows this tension to be discussed openly.

Expanded College and Career Counseling

This study describes in both generational groups that there were too few guidance counselors available to help students. In Montana, the counselor to student ratio is 1:400. For first-generation college-going students there is an increased need for families who do not know the ins and outs of college planning, career pathways planning and financial planning. The experiences of the 2005-2015 group as contrasted with the 1985-1995 group reveals the lack of financial planning for the latter group. While middle class families tend to take a more active role in assisting and insisting that their child plan for college and career, this is not the case for working class poor who tend to leave the responsibility of planning for higher education and career choices to their teens (MacTavish and Salamon, 2006). In the 2005-2015 group, while participants were confident that their parents would do what they could to get them to college, be it taking out loans or even selling their home, there was no evidence of the kind of planning described by the 1985-1995 group.

- Lowering the guidance counselors to student ratio to 1:200 in high schools or providing structures that allow for ongoing college and career counseling is crucial for students from first-time college-going families. Expanding the

allowable use of Title 1 funds in school districts with higher poverty levels is a financial mechanism for getting this goal accomplished.

- Prioritizing and training so that guidance counselors are “career” counselors.
- In addition to guidance counseling at the high school level, college and career counseling, housed in the high school, which spans the bridge from high school to one to two years after graduation is crucial in helping students navigate the financial planning needed which they were not able to take on in high school.

Community

Two major efforts are needed at the level of the community. The first attempts to deal with the concern of the narrowing of social networks in the 2005-2015 group. We know that these weak, non-kin ties are important in accessing opportunities and are discussed above in relationships. The second effort deals with how to work on complex problems that are unable to be solved by one entity, such as the school, working alone. Collective impact, or efforts that bring family, school and community resources together to work on shared goals on behalf of its children may bring more efficiently focus scarce resources (Stanford Social Innovation Review, n.d.).

- A collective impact approach that has school, community and families working on common goals based around what it takes for students to thrive is recommended. A draft copy of such an approach is included in the appendix. (Tracking in Livingston, 2015) This approach, in its beginning stages in Livingston, gives the entire community a common language and a pooling of

resources in working to solve problems such as mitigating the effects of poverty in the poor and the working class.

Competing Discourses

Finally, how is it useful for school leaders to understand the dominant discourses of the time, for example, the discourses pertinent to this study of equality of opportunity, self-reliance and choice? As discussed in Chapter Two and at the start of this section, tensions between and inside of societal discourses get played out at the school level. As discussed earlier, when we fail to take into consideration differences that come out of poverty and social class, or when we ignore unequal social structures, we perpetuate inequality.

A participant in the 2005-2015 group spoke the discourse of equality of opportunity when she discussed that her family was “too rich” to be eligible for grants, but “too poor” to afford college, or that “rich” parents can afford to send their children to colleges out-of-state that the working class student does not consider as a possibility. This participant recognized something amiss in this discourse of equality of opportunity which conveys that one should be able to get ahead and reach goals if they work hard enough, and that achieving goals is not dependent on one’s family wealth, social standing, or connection (Putnam, 2015; Silva, 2013).

As the notion of bettering oneself through schooling, hard work and initiative is an engrained hope and expectation in our culture (Laureau, 2012), we see participants in the 2005-2015 generation who find hope through the discourse of self-reliance (Cuervo, 2014). When another participant talks about his father who, although a college graduate,

has always been a laborer, and who, 20 years later, is still paying off school loans, in his decision to go not go farther in his education says, “That really kind of opened my eyes to the fact that you can be successful without going to college.” It was this participant who worked full-time while going to high school and paid the mortgage on his home while still in high school when his father was unable to send money home. While this young man’s individual drive and sense of autonomy is strong, one also senses a hardening, a kind of bracing of oneself, as Silva describes (2013). Echoing what Cuervo (2013) discusses in his work with youth in rural Australia, while there is increasing understanding of inequalities in our world, we tend to ultimately resort to the notion that in the end, one’s success or failure is due to choices we make, or our own effort and drive.

As school leadership teams, we have the responsibility to understand how the dominant discourses of our day play out in everyday acts and life (Smith, 1987, 1999, 2005) both inside and outside of the school walls. It is imperative to acknowledge pressures that are felt and the contradictions inherent in the school system, for example, to provide the educational rigor necessary so that students are ready for credit-bearing courses at the college level, while also knowing that students are struggling to focus and concentrate due to stress or that they have a difficult time being able to complete homework because they work long hours. While we may not have readily available answers to these issues, it is necessary to hold the tension and dialogue, or else we run the risk of perpetuating inequality, and placing responsibility on students and families for not meeting our expectations. This only adds to the stress of already precarious situations.

An ethnographic case study is said to succeed (Merriam, 1998) when knowledge is gained about the culture. In this section, implications and insights gained from the findings that may be put into action have been discussed. The following section outlines recommendations for further research.

Recommendations for Further Research

This was a study that was limited in scope. Expansion of the study in both generational groups would enable differences and similarities to be seen. Specifically, expansion of the participants in the 1985-1995 group to include those who did not graduate from college could be useful. Conversely, in the 2005-2015 group, expanding the group to include more students who did graduate from college could also be useful to ascertain the interplay of factors as students transitioned from high school. A comparison middle to upper-middle class group could reveal similarities and differences between generational groups, thereby helping educational leadership teams in examining educational practices that could work to eliminate barriers.

According to Brown and Schafft (2011), in their discussion of the intersection of rural economic policy with the school system assert that “a focus on root causes rather than contemporary symptoms is essential in ameliorating rural (or urban) poverty (p. 226). Further quantitative research that expands upon or debunks Putnam’s (2015) research in regard to the widening income gap and the effects on educational attainment for rural students could help to point to changes needed in rural economic and school policy.

In their recommendations for rural policy initiatives, rural communities that have “strong and effective social structure are more likely to prosper economically than their counterparts that lack effective institutions, organizations, and social relationships” (p. 229). These structures include responsive local governments, effective schools, and a high level of strong and weak social ties. The bind is that the financial resources are not available to build these rural communities. Additional research that focuses on successful rural communities that have built and integrated strong educational institutions with a strong economic core could be useful.

Finally, study and research that helps to equip rural educational leadership teams to more easily see and articulate how the dominant discourses of the day, shape policy initiatives, accountability and standardization measures and educational practices should be pursued. How do rural school leaders react if faced with situations where their own professional judgment is at odds with what they know to be best for the children and families of their community? In understanding and analyzing how rural educational leaders conceptualize the causes of the problems they face at the local level, and by examining their responses to those problems, we may better understand the relationship between effective leadership behavior and the context in which a leader attempts to lead (Louis et al, 2010). Further, through the cultivation of positions of resistance, we may assist educational leadership teams in effectively critiquing educational policy discourse.

Final Summary

Public high schools in the United States are charged with the preparing students for both citizenship and so that they have the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary

for success in postsecondary education and economically viable career pathways. This study examines the problem of how to prepare students for college and work in a United States rural west, deindustrialized, working-class community where jobs and careers that allow for upward economic mobility are scarce and the purpose for education beyond high school is not seen.

This study both adds to and bolsters the body of knowledge that is emerging about how school and non-school factors influence pathways from high school to college and career in rural communities. While recent research concludes that rural youth are less likely than non-rural youth to attend and stay in college, regardless of academic achievement in high school, less is known about the factors that influence the decisions that students make as they are making the transition, specifically students from working-class families, who are more likely to be first generation college-going students.

The methodology used in this project was that of an ethnographic case study that sought to identify and to understand the interplay of school-based and non-school-based factors that influenced high school students' decisions as they graduated and made the transition from school to college and work. Two generational groups of alumni from working class families in the same high school were studied. The first group was comprised of those who graduated from Park High School in the decade that followed the closure of the Burlington Northern railroad in Livingston, Montana in 1985. The second group was comprised of those who graduated a generation later, between the years of 2005-2015, 20-30 years after deindustrialization.

The school and non-school based themes that emerged from the findings for the 1985-1995 group were *Do something besides beat up your body* and *College as an investment* which refers to the hope by parents and participants that higher education was a way to find financial stability and security in the job market. A third theme that emerged is *Surrounded by community* which refers to a high level of community and school involvement as well as the support of social networks. The final theme that emerged was *In the name of my future self*, which refers to how participants felt that teachers and community mentors helped them to envision their futures and helped them in what they might do to reach their goals. A sub-theme, *In spite of*, as an indicator of resilience and fortitude, described moving past obstacles that stood in the way of getting high education.

The non-school based themes that emerged from the findings for the 2005-2015 group *Getting thrown into adult life* and *College is a gamble* which characterizes how the interplay of family financial stress, parent expectations for educational attainment and a struggling economy in the community influenced decisions made as students transitioned from high school. For students who had anticipated going on to college and then found themselves unsure whether the student loan debt would be worth it, they expressed feeling unprepared to leave the structure of high school and family. The participants from this generation, for the most part, did not feel they had the luxury of exploring what they might do for a career while burdening themselves with debt.

The school-based themes that emerged for the 2005-2015 generational group were *A real-world class [course]* and *I've found a college for you* which characterizes a

complex interplay of factors consisting of the greater role that high school teachers, mentors and guidance counselors have in helping students make the transition from high school, as community networks and important “weak” social ties diminish. There is also tension between the school and this generational group as the school is criticized simultaneously for not preparing students for the real-world by teaching enough personal finance and budgeting skills and either for not pushing college too much or not enough.

The implications of this study for school leadership and for future research consist of both individual and collective approaches. Short and medium-term approaches include the importance of expanding college and career exploration opportunities in high school, additional courses that meld the academic with the practical for greater student engagement, rigor and creativity, and a collective impact agenda to more closely align and articulate school, family and community goals around what it takes to raise a child who has a chance to thrive makes for efficient use of community resources. Longer-term approaches include a rural policy agenda that provides greater aid in the form of grants to reduce the burden of debt for rural students. Finally, in order to look at root causes, it is important for school leadership teams to look at and work with dominant societal discourses at play in school and in society in order to understand the context in which we attempt to educate our students.

In conclusion, the economic restructuring that occurred a generation after the deindustrialization of a rural western community altered the factors that affected the transition from high school to college and work for children in working class families. From the insight gained through the passage of time as two generational groups from the

same high school navigated their futures, we see that financial stress and financial instability weigh heavily on this present generation. Amassing tens of thousands of dollars of school loan debt that go with the decision to attend college, then to be faced with underemployment, makes college a nonstarter, particularly for those unsure about career plans. While, as individual educators, or a school district, or a community, we are unable to alter unequal social structures and inequalities, we have an obligation to intervene in ways that mitigate our students' derailment by the political, economic and social conditions of the day.

In the writing of this final chapter, I have been touched by six deaths in the community under study over the past seven months. Five of the six deaths were by suicide. One death was due to an alcohol-related accident. Three of the deaths were of high school students, two of them suicides by hanging that occurred a week apart. Two adult suicides by hanging occurred within the next week. While the cause of suicide is complex, the pain and hopelessness in the moment that results in the taking of one's own life is real. Although this is not the venue to discuss the loss of these lives, it is impossible to extricate the person from his surrounds and situations. We should ask ourselves what might this indicate about ways in people are destabilized by the derailments that are the focus of this study.

In the words of Silva (2013), "The health and vibrancy of all our communities depend on the creation and nurturance of notions of dignity that foster connection and interdependence, rather than hardened selves" (p. 157). Young people need for us to listen, really listen, and to act and examine ourselves, our discourses, and our school

structures, from our positions as educators, in order to understand the circumstances and the factors that influence this path from high school to young adulthood so that we may help them have a sense of dignity and of hope that they may have rich lives and meaningful work in their futures.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FORM A

Description: Hi, my name is Lynne Scalia. I'm doing a study on what it's been like to go to school and make (or begin) the transition to adulthood in this community. I'm interested in going to school has changed from around the time the railroad closed to the current generation.

I'm going to ask you questions about your high school years and how you moved on in your life from high school. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or don't want to answer a question, let me know and we will move on or stop the interview.

(consent form here)

Section 1: Family/Background/Community

Graduating Class: _____

Place of Birth: _____ Age: _____

Highest Level of Education or Training Attained: _____

1A. What did your parents do for a living – before the big railroad cutbacks of 1984 and after 1984?

1B. Did the cutbacks in the railroad affect your transition from high school? *If yes, how?*

2A. Did your parents expect for you do homework or make certain grades when you were in high school?

2B. How did they convey that to you?

2C. Did your parents have an expectation of how far you would go in your education?

3A. When you were in high school, what did you with your time outside of school (jobs, activities) – after school, weekends, summers?

3B. Did how you spent your time outside of school (activities, jobs) influence your post-high school path?

4A. When you were growing up, did you go to Sunday school or community activities like 4-H or Scouts? *If yes, what activities?*

4B. Do you remember any mentors you talked with about what you might do after high school? Describe.

5A. When you were in high school, did you want to live in this community or come back to this community when you were an adult?

5B. How did this influence the decisions you made when you graduated from high school?

6A. Do you remember times when your parents seemed to struggle economically – when they couldn't pay the bills or worried about money?

6B. Did your family's economic situation have an affect on your path to college, career or work?

Section 2: Memories/Perceptions of School Supports

7A. Can you remember how you felt about/viewed yourself as a high school student?

Probe: capable/not capable of being successful in school; engaged/unengaged student

7B. In retrospect, did your view of yourself as a student influence your path from high school? Please explain.

7C. Has that view changed over the years? How so?

8A. When you think of a teacher in high school who had a positive influence on you, what did he/she value in a student? *Probe for non-cognitive readiness skills, ex., persistence, creativity, problem solving, etc.*

8B. In thinking back, did this teacher influence your post-high school path? *If yes, how so?*

9A. Was college, careers and work after high school talked about in your classes at school?

9B. *If yes, how was it talked about? Was this helpful to you?*

10A. When you began to think about what you wanted to be when you grew up, what did you do to get more information or a feel for what this work/career field might be like?

10B. Were there career exploration/apprenticeship or job shadowing opportunities in high school? Did you utilize any of these? *Explain.*

10C. How did this influence your decision-making about what you would do after high school?

11A. Do you remember talking with guidance counselors or teachers about your choices after high school? *Probe: who, in what format,*

11B. How did this influence your decision-making regarding your path after high school?

11C. *If college or post-high training was discussed, How did you figure out how you would finance your education or training? Probe: did school assist, to what degree?*

12A. If you had a change to do high school over again, is there anything you would have wanted the school do to differently?

12B. In looking back, how could the school have been more helpful to you as you made the transition from high school?

Since this is a relatively small study, I will identify your data through a pseudonym. Is there a name you would like me to use? _____

Would you like me to send you a copy of the interview so that you can review it for accuracy and make changes if needed? _____

Would you like to review it by e-mail or paper copy? _____

E-mail: _____ / Address: _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FORM B

Description: Hi, my name is Lynne Scalia. I'm doing a study on what it's been like to go to school and make (or begin) the transition to adulthood in this community. I'm interested in going to school has changed from around the time the railroad closed to the current generation.

I'm going to ask you questions about your high school years and how you moved on in your life from high school. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or don't want to answer a question, let me know and we will move on or stop the interview.

(consent form here)

Section 1: Family/Background/Community

Graduating Class: _____ Place of Birth: _____

Age: _____ Highest Level of Education or Training Attained: _____

- 1A. What do your parents do for a living?
- 1B. Has what they do for a living had an influence on what you've done in choosing your future education or work? *If yes, how so?*
- 1C. The railroad once provided a good many more jobs in the community than it does now. Did the "railroad town" history have an effect on the decisions you made or the choices you felt you had as you were leaving high school?
- 1D. If yes, how so?

- 2A. Did your parents expect for you do homework or make certain grades when you were in high school?
- 2B. How did they convey that to you?
- 2C. Did your parents have an expectation of how far you would go in your education?

- 3A. When you were in high school, what did you with your time outside of school (jobs, activities) – after school, weekends, summers?
- 3B. Did how you spent your time outside of school (activities, jobs) influence your post-high school path?

- 4A. When you were growing up, did you go to Sunday school or community activities like 4-H or Scouts? *If yes, what activities?*
- 4B. Do you remember any mentors you talked with about what you might do after high school? Describe.

- 5A. When you were in high school, did you want to live in this community or come back to this community when you were an adult?
- 5B. How did this influence the decisions you made when you graduated from high school?

6A. Do you remember times when your parents seemed to struggle economically – when they couldn't pay the bills or worried about money?

6B. Did your family's economic situation have an effect on your path to college, career or work?

Section 2: Memories/Perceptions of School Supports

7A. Can you remember how you felt about/viewed yourself as a high school student?

Probe: capable/not capable of being successful in school; engaged/unengaged student

7B. In retrospect, did your view of yourself as a student influence your path from high school? Please explain.

7C. Has that view changed over the years? How so?

8A. When you think of a teacher in high school who had a positive influence on you, what did he/she value in a student? *Probe for non-cognitive readiness skills, ex., persistence, creativity, problem solving, etc.*

8B. In thinking back, did this teacher influence your post-high school path? *If yes, how so?*

9A. Was college, careers and work after high school talked about in your classes at school?

9B. *If yes, how was it talked about? Was this helpful to you?*

10A. When you began to think about what you wanted to be when you grew up, what did you do to get more information or a feel for what this work/career field might be like?

10B. Were there career exploration/apprenticeship or job shadowing opportunities in high school? Did you utilize any of these? *Explain.*

10C. How did this influence your decision-making about what you would do after high school?

11A. Do you remember talking with guidance counselors or teachers about your choices after high school? *Probe: who, in what format,*

11B. How did this influence your decision-making regarding your path after high school?

11C. *If college or post-high training was discussed, How did you figure out how you would finance your education or training? Probe: did school assist, to what degree?*

12A. If you had a chance to do high school over again, is there anything you would have wanted the school do to differently?

12B. In looking back, how could the school have been more helpful to you as you made the transition from high school?

Since this is a relatively small study, I will identify your data through a pseudonym. Is there a name you would like me to use? _____

Would you like me to send you a copy of the interview so that you can review it for accuracy and make changes if needed? _____

Would you like to review it by e-mail or paper copy? _____

E-mail: _____ / Address: _____

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

SUBJECT CONSENT FORM
FOR
PARTICIPATION IN HUMAN RESEARCH AT
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Transitioning from high school to college and work in a de-industrializing community

You are being asked to participate in a research study that examines the obstacles and opportunities faced by individuals and families in navigating the transition from high school to adulthood in a community that has experienced economic restructuring over the past 30 years. This study may help K-12 school systems, and specifically, high schools, in understanding how to assist students as they transition into and from high school.

If you agree to participate you will be asked to participate in one 45 to 60-minute interview regarding your childhood, educational experiences and your transition from high school to the next steps in your life. The interview will be audio taped. These tapes will be erased by August 1, 2016. I may also contact you at a future date to clarify questions or to provide insight into my interpretation of the data. Field notes will be taken during data collection.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There are no foreseen risks. You are free to stop participating at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You may ask me about the research procedures and I will answer your questions to the best of my ability. **Your participation in this research study is confidential.** Following our initial conversations, I will identify you using a code number. I will be the only person with access to the key linking your name with this code number. Results of this study will be reported using pseudonyms. If I believe that information from this interview could result in you being uniquely identifiable, I will not disclose this information.

If you have any questions regarding this research project you can contact me, Lynne Scalia, at (406) 581-5969. Any additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by Dr. Tena Versland at (406) 994-6799, my academic advisor and dissertation committee chair, or by the chair of the MSU Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Mark Quinn, (406) 994-4707.

I have read the above and understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedures. I understand and consent to the conditions of this study as described. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Participant Signature

Date

Interviewer Signature

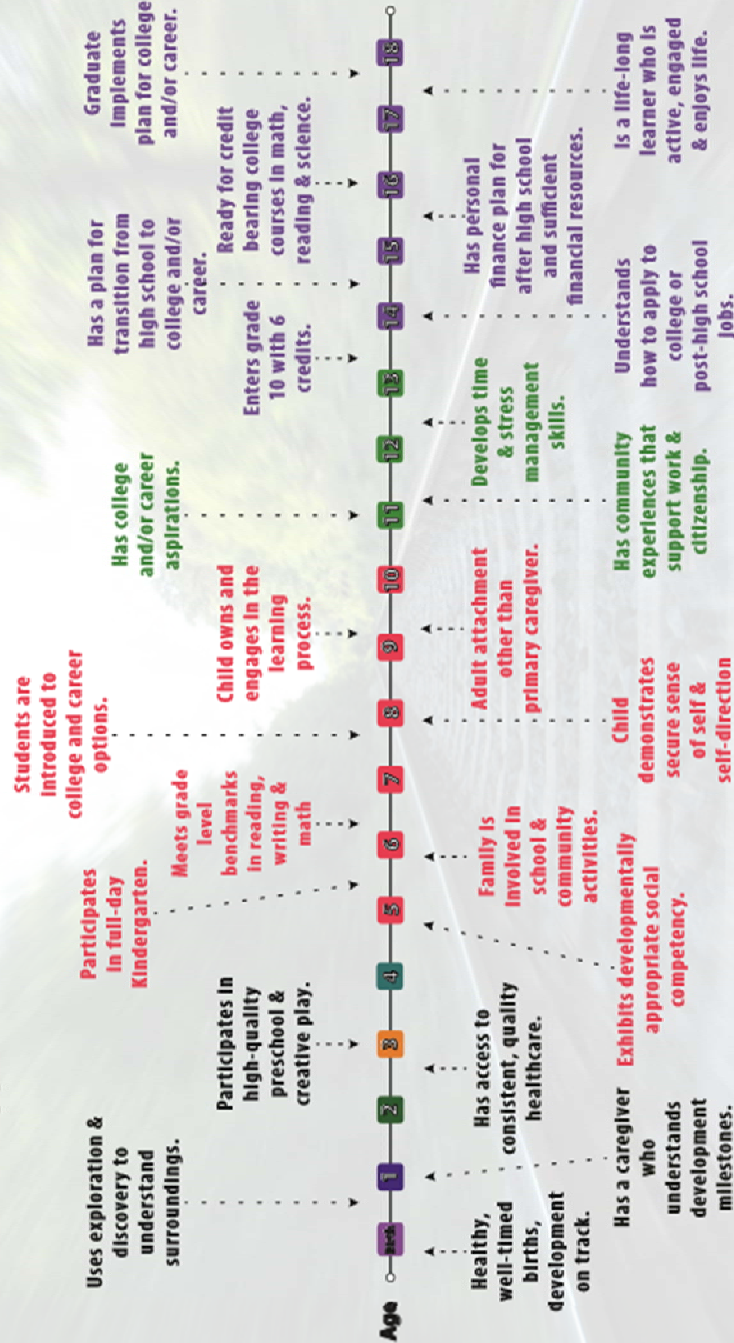
Date

APPENDIX D

COLLECTIVE IMPACT MAP

• TRACKING IN LIVINGSTON •

Academic Support



Family & Community Support

Elementary Middle School High School

Revised 2/8/2016

Goals:

- Youth are prepared for college and careers.
- Youth have increased prospects of thriving, belonging and engaging.
- The highest risk youth receive effective services and supports.