Career Development and Planning Issues for Rural Adolescent Girls

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ABSTRACT

Life-career planning and counselling often highlights a dilemma for young women, who feel torn by conflicting values around work and family. This situation is particularly challenging for young women living in rural communities because they may have limited access to role models. In this qualitative study, eight young women describe how they experienced growing up in a rural environment and the impact of that experience on their future plans. Several metathemes emerged from their narratives which have practical relevance for counsellors who are helping youth to shape their futures.

RÉSUMÉ

La gestion de la vie personnelle et de la carrière met souvent en évidence le dilemme éprouvé par les jeunes femmes qui se sentent divisées par des valeurs opposées, le travail et la famille. Cette situation est particulièrement difficile pour les jeunes femmes vivant en communauté rurale, car ces femmes n'ont pas d'exemples à imiter. Dans l'étude qualitative en question, huit jeunes femmes décrivent comment elles ont grandi en milieu rural et l'influence que cela a eu sur leurs projets futurs. On peut tirer plusieurs métathèmes qui sont pertinents de manière concrète pour les personnes qui vont conseiller les jeunes dans leur cheminement vers le futur.

Female participation in the labour force has increased rapidly over the past few decades. The fact that almost half of the Canadian workforce are women (Statistics Canada, 1995) emphasizes the importance of providing career information to females early in life. Given these circumstances, it is imperative that young women become planful about their life-career paths. In particular, young women living in rural areas may experience unique personal and external influences on their life-career plans. Several themes highlighted in the literature indicate the need for greater attention to the process of rural adolescent girls' life-career development. Firstly, young women from rural areas face the challenge of living in communities which depend more on natural resource industries. Rural areas (which are defined by Statistics Canada as places that have a population concentration of less than 1000 and population density of less than 400 people per square kilometre) are particularly vulnerable to the economic restructuring occurring in industrialized nations. Economic dependence on resource-based industry restricts both the number and range of occupational opportunities in the goods-producing sector, and small populations in these communities limit opportunity in the service industries (Ehrensaft & Beeman, 1992).

Secondly, young rural women have limited access to a wide variety of role models combining work and family. Rural family members have been found to be significantly more traditional than urban family members, especially in gender role socialization (Astin, 1984; Conrad, 1997; Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). Socialization that emphasizes home and family pursuits not only narrows young women's life-career options, but also puts them at a disadvantage in the world of work. The "brain drain" that occurs when talented and high wage earners leave small communities for profitable positions elsewhere deprives rural youth of the opportunity to have a variety of role models, to hear new thoughts and ideas, and to see the benefits of earning power that can be used to update the community (Tolbert & Lyson, 1992).

Thirdly, young women living in rural communities may find the negotiation of multiple life roles and demands of adulthood particularly difficult (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Weitzman, 1994). In a study of adolescents' future narratives, female participants foresaw a life course consisting of a series of relational and career transitions with equal and persisting responsibility in each domain (Greene & Wheatley, 1992). It appears that young women make many of their career-related decisions, such as decisions about further education and relocation, based on how those decisions would affect their relationship with important others (Sandberg, Ehrhardt, Mellins, Ince, & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1987). These findings illustrate the assertion made by Markus and Ruvolo (1989) that adolescents' perceived self-roles, or "possible selves," direct the acquisition of appropriate self-knowledge, the development of plans, and the pursuit of suitable behaviours. Elaborated possible selves should organize and energize young people toward life-career goals.

Lastly, young people in small Canadian communities face reduced access to higher education, narrow school curricula and fewer programs and services (Cahill & Martland, 1996; Jeffrey, Lehr, Hache, & Campbell, 1992; Lehr & Jeffrey, 1996). Yet, as Hektner (1995) points out, moving away to pursue educational and/or work opportunities often results in very mixed feelings for rural young people who are strongly identified with their community. Given these findings, counsellors need to keep in mind that the life-career plans and decisions of young rural women may be different from their urban counterparts as a result of the geographic, social, and economic context within which they develop.

Of further relevance to the career development of rural youth is the influence of a person's life-context or life situation on both their understanding of and choices about work (Blustein, 1997; Cahill & Martland, 1994; Herr, 1996; Peavy, 1993; Savickas, 1993; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). These authors call attention to the importance of considering an individual's social, political, cultural, economic and physical milieus, and how these unite to produce the circumstances in which an individual organizes his or her identity, value systems, and life course.

One often overlooked aspect of context is the concept of "place-identity" (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Like people, things, and activities,

places are a fundamental part of the social world of daily life. Although physical, social, and cultural contexts influence place identity, place identification is also mediated by the characteristics people bring to places. "People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, a referent of their identity" (Cohen, 1985, p. 118). Cahill and Martland (1994) noted the importance that sense of place, community attachment, environmental preferences, and social preferences played in the career choices of residents of fishing villages in Newfoundland. These authors call for career counsellors to recognize the diversity of individuals and the unique ways they interact with their particular environments.

In recent years, a number of career-related programs and resources, such as The Real Game (National Life/Work Centre, 1996), WorkInfoNet (a national work information website), and the British Columbia Career and Personal Planning curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1997) have been developed to support career planning for young people. However, most career counselling materials and programs carry what Jeffrey et al. (1992) term an "urban assumption." Rural youth and their parents need information and services which are "tailored to their situation" (p. 253).

Whether rural or urban, the career development process of young women is particularly complex (Brooks, 1990; Osipow, 1983; Zunker, 1994). Betz (1993) believes that situational or contextual variables best explain women's life-career paths. Women often adjust their plans, aspirations, and needs to the situations in which they find themselves, and to the expectations they perceive others to have of them. According to several researchers (Archer, 1985; Eccles, 1987; Farmer, 1984; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994; Gilligan, 1982), the career development of young women is affected in specific ways by factors such as occupational gender stereotypes, gender-role socialization, and conflicting values around work and family. "Sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 16). In particular, the messages and expectations communicated through family, as well as the type of relationships young women have with their family, have an effect on their career development (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Lankard, 1995; Marjoribanks, 1988; O'Brien, 1996; Penick & Jepsen, 1992; Sandberg et al., 1987). Farmer (1984) suggests that women are much more likely than men to experience the effects of increased role confusion and environmental constraints in making life-career plans.

On the positive side, rural environments provide young women with experiences their urban counterparts may not have. In their book, *Rural and small town Canada*, Bollman and Biggs (1992) found that rural communities offer closer connections to people and to the land. In general, there is a strong commitment to supporting others in the community and more people volunteer their time to help others. In their in-depth study of the small community of Bremer, Washington, Allen and Dillman (1994) found that concern with the whole person, con-

cern with tradition, and other community-guided behaviours existed "in every sphere of life, from politics to earning a living" (p. 220). Hedlund (1993) found that rural youth both liked and disliked growing up in their small rural community. The close interpersonal connections provided a sense of safety and belonging, but were also seen by some to restrict personal privacy and foster prejudices. Hedlund comments that there has been relatively little research about rural adolescents and "almost none that has provided an opportunity for rural adolescents themselves to say what is important to them — to express their own thoughts, feelings, needs, or values" (p. 150).

In summary, the literature reveals a number of issues and challenges which relate to the life-career plans of young rural women. However, few researchers have actually explored the perceptions of the rural adolescents themselves. The present paper describes the first phase of large-scale project aimed at in-depth exploration of rural youth's experiences. In order to pilot test the interview format planned as part of the larger project, eight young women were interviewed about their experience of growing up in a small community, and about the perceived impact of those sociocultural, educational, and environmental experiences on their career development process and plans.

METHOD

The choice of data collection strategies was guided by Cicourel's question, "Do our instruments capture the daily life, opinions, values, attitudes and knowledge base of those we study. . . ?" (1982, p. 15). To this end the participants' perceptions and understandings of their experiences were elicited through open-ended interviews. The authors followed the seven stages of an interview investigation (Kvale, 1996): thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, interpreting, verifying, and reporting.

An ethnographic narrative approach was utilized because of the anticipated importance of context and "place-identity" (cf. E. M. Bruner, 1997). The premise of ethnographic narrative and this study is that a holistic picture of informants in their community can be obtained by drawing upon the narrative, including point of view, voice, and experience of participants.

Participants

The setting for the study is situated in the southern interior of British Columbia. The economy is based on forestry, agriculture, and tourism. Recent cutbacks in the forestry sector have resulted in job losses. Over the past two years, an average of 14.5% of young adults (aged 19-24) have received either Social Assistance or Employment Insurance each month (Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, 1998). Young women, aged 17 to 19, known to the first author were contacted by letter. This age group was targeted because they are making a significant transition from high school to work and /or post-secondary education and they would likely be considering future plans. The pool of potential partici-

pants was expanded to 20 young women through chain sampling (Babbie, 1990). Eight participants were drawn from this pool on the basis of their availability, their rural residency, and their willingness to discuss the influence of community context on their plans for the future.

Procedure

The aim of the specific interviewing procedure was to procure rich descriptive material in order to understand the ways in which young women come to construct a sense of their community and its impact of their life-career plans. The interview guide included four broad questions:

1. *Initial question*: What has it been like for you growing up in a rural community? Tell me about your friends, family, school, and activities.
2. *Life-career plans*: As you have finished high school, you are probably thinking about your future. How do you see your future unfolding, with regard to work, relationships, and education?
3. *Effect of rural community*: When you think about your plans for the future, how has growing up in a rural community affected those plans?
4. *Self-identity*: Think about who you are in this community and tell me about yourself. How would you name and describe your different selves?

Participants were interviewed in their homes as a way to minimize formality and facilitate trust (Wenger, 1985), and as a means to gather contextual information (Spradley, 1979). During the discussion about life-career plans, participants drew a conceptual map to visually indicate the importance of certain features in their lives, as well as the relationships among different aspects (Cahill & Martland, 1994; Peavy, 1997; Shepard & Marshall, 1999). The young women were also asked to explicate their present and future selves in relation to the community using Markus and Nurius' (1986) concept of "possible selves." Participants described currently held selves and future and undeveloped selves using a procedure developed by the authors (Shepard and Marshall, 1999), and based on a paper and pencil measure developed by Cross and Markus (1991).

Data Analysis

All interviews were tape-recorded, and were transcribed by the first author. The interviews averaged 1½ hours in length. The inquiry process began with immersion in the entire transcripts. Two levels of analysis were utilized. The first level involved two approaches. First, phrases which revealed something about the research focus and answered the interview questions were highlighted (van Manen, 1984, p. 60). These "content categories" were listed as they occurred in the data, and colour-coded. Additional categories were named as needed. A research colleague confirmed the content categories by independently sorting non colour-coded cards into the established categories — agreement between these two raters was 98%. The second approach involved going through each

transcript "line-by-line" (van Manen, 1984) breaking down each content category into more specific "themes." Themes were written on file cards, and were colour-coded to match the content categories. File cards were then sorted by topic category into themes and each theme was labeled with a phrase or statement that captured the essential meaning of the theme, for example, "no place for us." Only those themes and sub-themes described by three or more participants are presented in Table 1. The second level of analysis involved looking for connections or interrelations across content categories, themes, and sub-themes. These "metathemes" (Tesch, 1987) emerged as a result of continued immersion in the data (both tapes and transcripts).

The validity of the data rests on Lincoln & Guba's (1985) four criteria. Credibility was achieved through triangulation involving different data collection modes and participants' verification of the main points of the interview. Dependability was achieved through consistent recording accuracy, data collection and analysis procedures including rater confirmation. Confirmability was addressed by keeping a reflexive journal and an interview log. Transferability judgments were made possible by providing "thick descriptions" and contextual details.

RESULTS

This section covers the descriptive, or first level of data analysis. Eleven major content categories were identified in the data, as well as more specific themes and sub-themes within each. Nine of eleven categories were mentioned by all participants, and these are described below. Selected quotes from the transcripts are included, and are identified by the participant's code number.

Living in This Community

In this category, there were two themes: "Advantages of living in this community" and "Limitations of living in this community." The young women described several advantages of growing up in a rural community. They appreciated not only the interpersonal intimacy of this community, but also the feeling of safety and security that resulted.

> . . . my dad was in Australia and mom got subbing calls day after day after day so it was me at home with my, all three siblings and when some of my neighbours found out about this I got about five phone calls saying, "If you ever need anything, don't hesitate to call me. I'll be right over there." So it was really nice to know that there was that friendship there to help you when it's needed.

The participants deeply identified with nature and valued the number of recreational opportunities that their physical world offered. Some of the participants treasured the space and quiet found in their small community. "Well, the scenery is beautiful . . . In the fall you notice it most. You can go outside and it's quiet and you don't hear anything . . . maybe a bird, but there's nothing else there and it's so peaceful."

However, along with the advantages, seven of the participants were also aware of the "Limitations of living in this community." A common sub-theme running

through their narratives was the distance from town which impacted on their ability to see their friends, to take part in social activities, and to have a part-time job. Up until the young person obtains a driver's license and has access to a car, they are dependent on parents' involvement.

> I'm stuck in the house now . . . having to wait until my parents want to go somewhere before I can go. I think that's what I don't like the most — is living out here and not being able to go places and . . . I wasn't able to get a job . . .

As well, the young women were frustrated by the lack of places where they could get together with friends. The emphasis on sports and other structured social activities in town leaves few opportunities and few acceptable locations to just spend time with friends. Participants were also aware of the lack of job and educational opportunities in town. Although half of the participants wanted to stay in the community after graduation, they saw moving away as inevitable: ". . . there aren't that many jobs and not that much variety . . . College isn't really that great here so you pretty well have to leave your home and move away."

Family

This category was expressed in varying contexts throughout the interviews. Seven participants included examples of the theme of "Closeness/support" from various family members, including the extended family.

> My grandmother would baby-sit, we'd cook together and . . . in the last couple of years, she's helped me monetarily. She's given me a lot of money so I could go on trips and she's totally nonjudgmental. She's like, she's really a nice person. She's there and I can talk to her about anything.

"Doing things together" was another Family-related theme mentioned by almost all the participants. "Well, my family, they've always been there for me . . . since we've worked together it builds closer relationships well and home too, like it all adds in and helps you if you need help, it's kind of easier." Participants were aware of the effort parents made to get them to activities, and how they were "Depending on them for rides." "My parents always let us do all the sports activities so it was pretty nice. Sometimes it requires a lot of time and driving . . . some of the kids might have 5 o'clock practice and others would have 7 o'clock practice."

Friends

Not surprisingly, Friends was another category revealed in the narratives. Themes of "Closeness/support" and "Doing things together" were emphasized. However, six of the participants also pointed out the difficulty of seeing their friends who lived in town.

> Most of my friends live in town now . . . and I don't always feel like going all the way into town to see them . . . and without my own car . . . it's hard. But friends are really. . . . well family is too, but I'm really close to my friends too. They are there for you, especially when most of your friends are involved in the same activities, like 4-H or baseball.

Interestingly, only two of the participants referred to boyfriends as important.

School and Education

Among this group of young women, school and education experiences were important in their lives. For most participants, school provided a forum for exploring themselves through sports, drama, and fitness classes. "I'm really involved in school . . . I'm in jazz choir and band and I'm on the yearbook committee. I sang a solo at grad." The relationships they developed with teachers and coaches provided support and fellowship.

> I learned a lot from one of my teachers . . . like I became close friends with her . . . and I got really interested in French and then I went into Japanese . . . She's pointed me in the direction of language . . . helped me see my potential there.

Sports and Other Activities

All of the participants were highly active in sports and other activities, either through their school or through community programs. Baseball, volleyball, basketball, 4-H, youth groups, choir, musical theatre, band, ballroom dancing, and cadets were most frequently mentioned. These activities presented occasions to develop "Skills and personal qualities" that were highly valued.

"I think it's made me more responsible and I have, like, way better organizational skills now because I've had to. There's a lot of organizing to do for the club show plus everything else involved in 4-H."

Self-Identity

The development of the young women's self-identity was often directly attributed to their role as a family member or member of a sports team or community group. All the participants commented on their sense of "Responsibility" as a daughter in the family and many of the participants took pride in the "Skills" and strong "Work ethic" they had obtained as a family member.

"We garden a lot so I kind of know how to take care of things more than people who live in towns. . . . I have lots of responsibilities that I wouldn't get in the city." One participant described how important it was to be responsible.

> . . . with the baby-sitting, and with the little odd jobs, you need to show a lot of responsibility, because, it's sort of like, a one-time thing, and if you don't show responsibility then you don't get called back again. Word definitely gets around in a small town.

Several of the young women described how they have a sense of "Self-respect and respect for others," often gained through school and other community-related activities.

> . . . the 4-H thing goes along with this sort of community. You learn a lot about responsibility and teamwork. You also learn to be a leader-type thing and that's why I've carried on to wanting to become a teacher. . . . I feel pretty good about the skills I've learned . . . I guess I've come to respect my self. . . . and teaching others . . . well you learn to appreciate and respect them for what they do and how they contribute.

Information and Resources Available

All participants were able to list a number of these, relating to employment and/or educational opportunities outside the community. "School resources"

such as counsellors, career centres, the Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) program, career preparation and work experience were cited as important sources of information. However, only one of the participants had actually made use of the career centre and none had seen a school counsellor. Although they named the resources which were available, half of the participants stated that the resources did not supply them with the type of information that would be helpful to them.

> Like saying these are your options, here are some of the possible scholarships you can get, giving you an outline for what universities might be like. They do a good job for the scholarships that are in the community, but I think they could do more for applying to provincial scholarships and just preparing you more for the jobs and careers and university that is to come.

Another expressed her frustration about using the Internet in the Career Centre to access scholarships.

> I know people who applied over the Internet, but no one pointed that out to me. Like the Internet's all good and everything, but if you don't know exactly what you're doing, it takes forever. When you're so stressed out with courses, basketball, travel time and a LIFE, the last thing you want to do is get on the computer . . .

Half of the participants commented that they had already made their career choices so they were not interested in finding out about other options. "Well, I've always wanted to be a teacher."

Future Plans

The young women in this study had thought about their future, and several themes emerged in this category. All participants had plans for "Further education" at college or university. Seven of the eight participants listed future "Occupational selves": journalist or graphic artist, something in communication or business, teacher (3), accountant, and kinesiologist. While they attended school outside the community, they anticipated "Travelling" to other countries. Several of the participants expected that in the foreseeable future they would be "Visitors in the community" . They wanted to remain close to their friends, but feared that they would lose touch with them. In the future, most of the young women planned to "Return to a small community," where they would continue to "Build close relationships," "Develop a community self," and experience "Marriage and motherhood."

Overall, the rural participants in this study see the many benefits of growing up in a rural community. Personal connections with the people around them, identification with nature, and participation in a variety of activities have given them a strong sense of identity. They are also cognizant of the constrained opportunities and resources in their community. However, in spite of perceived limitations, these participants would like to raise their children in similar rural settings.

SECOND LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

Upon further transcript readings and additional listening to the audiotapes, six metathemes emerged across the content categories for all participants:

attached and supported; people to look up to; being disregarded; valuing self; attachment to the environmental setting; and limited opportunity, information, and contacts. In this second level of analysis, the metathemes that emerged were consistent with many of the issues identified in the literature on rural youth.

Attachment and Support

The most dominant metatheme, appearing over and over again in the lives of these young women, was feeling attached and supported by the community. In this rural community, the participants feel closely connected to and supported by their friends and family. Many of the participants also state that church membership, close relationships with teachers, and involvement in sports and other community activities have been instrumental in instilling both a sense of attachment and support.

> I find it so close — like community-wise. It's not like you know everyone in the town or anything like that, but . . . it's just that there's so many people you can just go to . . . you feel close to, you can ask them, whatever, and you know them, and they know you. Like with basketball, it just seems like . . . it's so much supportive . . . like the whole town is rooting for us.

In her study of rural youth in New York State, Hedlund (1993) also found that knowing everyone was a pleasant experience for students because of the personal connection they felt with other people and the sense of belonging and identity that resulted. Yet, those same ties can constrain young women from seeking out opportunities beyond the security of family and community (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991).

People To Look Up To

Having people to admire and respect, such as friends and coaches, was a second metatheme evident across categories for all participants.

> With basketball, like my coaches were really, like they taught me a lot of things . . . not just about basketball. They are really incredible people . . . probably my biggest role models. You just look up to them . . . They taught me about teamwork and taking pride in myself. Taught me a lot of different things, like hard work and just like, never giving up . . .

The importance of family members, peers, and teachers as role models and guides has been noted by other researchers (Carter, 1997; Esterman & Hedlund, 1995; Hedlund, 1993). In this sample, however, none of the participants acknowledged their mother as an information source about balancing life roles; nor did this sample mention siblings or previous graduates who had successfully made the transition to larger communities for further education.

Being Disregarded

Although the young women in the study felt supported and connected to others in the community, they also felt disregarded when it came to providing a place for young people. This metatheme had several dimensions. All participants

described the frustration of having nothing to do outside of school. Most commented that the community makes little effort to provide a place for young people to "hang out." One young woman summarized their frustration:

> The older community didn't like having the skateboard park go in the community park. It was like, "I don't want that riff-raff beside our senior's community centre" and stuff. I mean it's just kids who want to go out and have somewhere to go because they get harped at for going downtown or going to the wharf so now they have a place to go and everyone's upset . . .

Several young women also expressed the belief that if the community wanted their young people to stay, they would make more of an effort to provide a wider assortment of occupational, educational, and training opportunities within the community. "It might be hard and it might be expensive . . . but members of the community could offer more work experience opportunities and help get young people started in things . . . " These young women view the limited educational, social, and cultural opportunities in the area as preventing them from developing all aspects of themselves. "I don't think I've been able to show myself . . . I haven't been able to develop my talents. . . . I certainly don't feel recognized or anything . . . in my community."

In her study, Hedlund (1993) uses the term "disenfranchised" to describe rural adolescents' feelings of not being heard and recognized. Several authors (Allen & Dillman, 1994; Conger & Elder, 1994; Fitchen, 1991; Hine & Hedlund, 1994) have pointed to youth as one of the most important, yet often overlooked resources available to rural communities.

Valuing themselves

The young women in this community valued themselves as family members, as workers, as friends, as participants in various activities, and as role models. They described themselves as having self-discipline, a sense of responsibility, a strong work ethic, a variety of skills, and self-respect. One young woman's description of herself sums up many of the participants' views of self:

> I 've really become, well really strong. You have to here. When I was 16, I started to drive — like 40 minutes through the snow to basketball practice and to school. That's a responsibility . . . to act and drive safely, but my parents gave me that responsibility. . . . I know that my sister looks up to me like I did with my brother and I feel somewhat responsible for how she turns out. I think I can help her more to go on the right road than my parents because I've been through the same thing. I can show her how you can be somebody and still keep to what you believe in.

The participants in this study seem quite introspective and had a strong sense of who they are. They have taken on responsibilities and they value the relationships they have with others. Gilligan (1980) points out that "female voices speak of the ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community" (p. 18). For many young women, the task of acquiring and nurturing various kinds of social relationships forms their sense of self (McBride, 1990). The promotion by society of nurturant, emotional and passive behaviours for

girls instills the fear of social isolation and abandonment in adolescent women (Archer, 1985). The present participants certainly showed responsibility, strong investment in supportive relationships, and some nurturing, however, their narratives showed little evidence of passivity or fear of abandonment.

Attachment to the Environmental Setting

This metatheme, expressed by all participants, was similar to what Proshansky et al. (1983) called "place identity." Ties to a physical place were reflected by some participants in descriptions of self.

> Living here, it's taught me to appreciate nature and the environment . . . I've also learned to appreciate myself kind of because I can see better, I can just see . . . kind of . . . like the beauty in myself . . . like I am a part of this."

Other participants expressed their attachment to the physical beauty of the area through the activities in which they participated. "I really like living here. . . . Everything's so beautiful and you can be part of it. . . . I can't imagine not living where it's beautiful and you can . . . do things." Cahill and Martland (1994) are convinced that geographical preference is an important factor in career decision making. According to Bollman & Biggs (1991) many people adjust or even compromise occupational goals in response to geographical preferences. The young women in this sample appear to exemplify this preference.

Limited opportunities, information, and contacts

This metatheme crossed several categories. A limited number of school courses, distance from town that prevents opportunities for social/cultural interaction and job contacts, the inadequacy of career resources, a narrow range of job opportunities, and few post-secondary educational possibilities restrict the world of these young women. "Sometimes you feel like . . . you're sheltered compared to people that are exposed to so much." These limitations have been noted by several authors (Bollman & Biggs, 1992; Cahill & Martland, 1996; Lehr & Jeffery, 1996), although the present participants did not include any specific statements about monetary or economic hardships. In fact, this sample of young women seem naive about the economic realities of their community. Recently, the two major employers in the area laid off a number of workers. The forestry industry has been particularly hard hit and there have been several store closures in the major town.

Implications for Research and Practice

In response to the four broad interview questions, the young women in this study were able to articulate their experience of growing up in a rural community, and the impact of that experience on their career development process and plans for the future. The picture that emerges from this study is tentative, given the size and scope of the sample. It should be noted that all the participants were high school graduates who planned to further their education. In the planned larger

study, participants will be selected to represent a wider range of geographical location, socioeconomic status, family, and educational background. Additional data collection methods will include surveys, photograph essays, and interviews with adults.

This research makes an important contribution to the advancement of knowledge because it focuses on a largely-ignored group — rural adolescents. Research has typically been conducted with the more numerous and easily accessible populations living in large towns and cities. The narratives provided by these young women support and extend the research pertaining to the life-career development and planning process of rural youth.

The present findings, as well as future research involving rural adolescents should be utilized to develop print and audio-visual resources addressing the needs of rural youth, along with strategies for life-career planning. These could be presented to rural counsellors, teachers, parents, and employers through focus groups, community events, workshops, and other training opportunities.

Several important themes emerge from this study which relate directly to counselling practice. Because connection and attachment to others is important in rural communities, counsellors need to pay particular attention to developing relationships that help clients feel secure and willing to engage in an exploration of life-career plans. Counsellors working in rural communities must understand the community's economy, political power structures, value systems, and changes occurring within the community. Recognition of specific contextual factors such as the client's attachment to place would also be helpful in establishing a therapeutic relationship. In career centres, counsellors need to find ways to offer personal contact to the rural adolescents. Community members, parents, and co-op students could be involved in the centre to assist with resource access and Internet searches, in conjunction with counselling sessions. To respond to the young people's desire for "people to look up to," job-shadowing and mentoring programs could also be developed with community members. Mentors could provide rural youth with support, as well as supplying much-needed practical information about the world of work.

The participants in this study identified a number of career resources available to them, however, they did not see them as applicable to their lives. Life-career information can be made more relevant by bringing in former graduates to talk about their experiences outside the community. Speakers could discuss the impact of the values and beliefs they learned by growing up in a rural community. Local occupational possibilities could be explored through school and community partnerships.

Because of adolescent sensitivity to "being disregarded," it is vitally important to involve them in the process. They can participate on committees, and bring their concerns to the attention of community leaders. Community youth councils could provide rural youth with a means to access funding for developing other social and recreational opportunities for young people in their community. In addition, such councils could be established using a mentorship model, with adults and youth sharing positions and responsibilities.

Career materials and programs need to fit with the experiences of rural residents. The young women in this sample expected to get married, buy an acreage, have children, and continue to work, however, they did not seem to have a realistic view of the demands of juggling all these varied roles. They need practical information that respects their values and beliefs, yet challenges them to consider other eventualities.

The young women in this study had many employability skills. They need guidance in seeing how they can implement these skills in the world outside their community. When discussing occupations, the connection between the rural transferable skills should be made explicit?

Counsellors can involve parents in helping young rural women make informed life-career plans. Information concerning the changing world of work, the costs involved in post-secondary training and education, apprenticeship programs, filling out scholarship applications, and coping with everyday life in larger communities, etc. could be presented in workshops, newspaper columns, and in newsletters.

In our rapidly changing postmodern world, the experiences and needs of rural young women have largely been ignored. Since economic globalization, pluralistic societies, increasing technology, and changing patterns of work affect us all, it is important that counsellors include this forgotten group as we enter the twenty-first century.

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