

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Are leaders born or are they made? Should we allocate time to *developing* leadership if leaders are born? Academics and coffee shop talkers have debated this issue for years if not centuries. One thing leadership scholars can agree upon is that leadership does not have an all-encompassing definition. In fact, Bernard Bass muses, “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (Wren, 1995, p. 25). A common denominator, however, among many definitions of leadership is the idea of *influence*. In myriad discussions on leadership, all leaders seem to exert some sort of influence on others through their relationships. The difference, then, between certain leaders could be measured by the amount of influence wielded. Joseph Rost (1991) comments:

My own view is that it should be no surprise that scholars and practitioners have not been able to clarify what leadership is, because most of what is written about leadership has to do with its peripheral elements and content rather than with the essential nature of leadership as a *relationship*. If scholars and practitioners have not focused on the nature of leadership, it should not surprise any of us who are interested in the subject that we do not know what leadership is (p. 5).

So, the question becomes, if a person develops his/her ability to influence, does he/she, in turn, develop his/her leadership?

The Research Problem

Since 1990, 69 out of 93 counties in Nebraska are reporting a net loss in population. A large majority of that population loss is young people. According to U.S. Census data, Nebraska is the 10th most heavily outmigrated state for young, single,

college-educated people (USDA, 2006). This exodus of young people from communities is often referred to as a “brain drain.”

A second concern is the “exodus” of young people from the voting booths. This problem is evident from low voter turnout from the 18 – 24 population age range (Colby et al, 2003). A study conducted by the California Adolescent Health Collaborative on this very issue discussed a possible reason for youth disengagement from community decision-making. They assert that the lack of emphasis within schools and communities on educating young people to participate in community-decision making and public policy is what leads to detachment (Clayton et al, 2000). Despite low turnout in voter registration, more students are participating in community service than ever before (Colby et al, 2003). Students are taking the lead when it comes to serving a need in their respective communities, but that same leadership is not reflected in civic activism. “Youth have been embracing community service as a way to make positive change in the community, but they don’t recognize the potential for social and political activism” (Rasmussen, 2003, n.p.).

To offset this loss of young people in communities and their engagement within those communities, an idea has emerged where communities can engage their youth in civic leadership. Under this new idea, leadership in youth is developed through community engagement. Youth have the power to create positive change in their communities alongside adults in a relationship of mutuality.

Developing leadership impacts youth on a variety of levels. It meets a number of needs including opportunities for relationships with caring adults, relationships with other outstanding peers, and meaningful engagement in the community and civic life. From a

broad perspective, providing opportunities for students to develop leadership encourages a number of skills to develop such as critical thinking, writing, public speaking, planning, and understanding group dynamics. These opportunities create the potential for a more engaged citizenry (Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001).

Developing leadership in youth can also have significant impacts on the community. Adults begin to recognize the human potential within their community. “It [youth leadership development] validates a growing recognition within the philanthropic community and among leadership theorists that personal and social development are essential conditions for strengthening a community’s capacity to respond to its problems and build its future” (Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001, p.3; emphasis added). Once their potential is recognized, youth can begin utilizing themselves as a human resource to meet community needs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to construct a grounded theory for how youth leaders develop through community engagement. From the theory, designs and directions for developing youth leadership through community engagement are presented.

Research Questions

The following question was central to this grounded theory study: How is youth leadership developed as a result of being engaged in community leadership? The following sub questions guided and directed the study:

1. What are the common strategies used to engage youth in the community in terms of community leadership and service, entrepreneurship education, career development, and adult support?

2. What leadership skills do youth gain from the engagement experience?
 - a. Do these skills align with the skills necessary for community leadership in the future? If so, how?
 - b. As a result of this skill attainment, what evidence is there that these skills are being used in the community?
3. What are the attitudes of youth in regard to civic engagement as a result of being involved in community leadership?
4. How has the community been effected by engaging their youth?
 - a. Have adults changed their perspectives? What is the evidence of that?

Delimitations

Interviewing and observing local community members in only three rural Nebraska counties was a delimitation of the study. Study participants were limited to the members in these particular counties.

Limitations

Using purposive sampling techniques for the grounded theory methods decreased the generalizability of the study. While the study's findings are relevant to the three rural communities at study, they may not necessarily reflect the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement in all rural communities.

Definition of Terms

Community. The term *community* refers to a geographically-bounded rural county.

Community engagement. The term *community engagement* refers to formal volunteering behavior demonstrated by youth and adults together for the purposes of community improvement. See definition of *formal volunteering*.

Formal volunteering. Volunteering is an act that occurs whenever the value of that act exceeds the compensation received by the donor (Smith, 1981 as cited in Ryan et al., 2005). *Formal volunteering* is most often demonstrated as a means to address needs of a collective entity (i.e. a community) in the context of a formal organization (Ryan et al., 2005). In this study, the context is extended to recognize the formal organization within the boundaries of community. *Formal volunteering* and *formal participation* were used synonymously.

Formal participation. See definition of *formal volunteering*.

Grounded theory. A *grounded theory* is a systematic and inductive qualitative research method in which the researcher generates a theory regarding a process or action based on the perspectives of the study participants (Creswell, 2005).

Rural. An area is considered *rural* if it is located in a county that has less than 1,000 people per square mile (ERS-USDA, 2003)

Significance of the Study

Communities, rural communities in particular, have felt the sting of population loss of young people for many years and, with that, have felt a looming fear regarding their uncertain future. In the practical literature, as well as in the sentiment of communities, the value of youth engagement is well justified. In rural communities, the issue of engaging youth is not due to skepticism. Many of these communities have had “crash and burn” attempts in the past. These communities have expressed a need for a

tangible and viable model by which they can engage their youth successfully. This study produces a model that richly describes the process of how youth leadership talents are developed while engaged in community leadership. The model generates a theory of youth engagement that can instruct communities in their future youth engagement initiatives.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Understanding Community Engagement

Gaining insight into the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement first requires an examination of community engagement—in particular, why people engage in their communities. In academic literature, community engagement is best described in terms of voluntary behavior, which occurs whenever the value of the act exceeds the compensation received by the donor (Smith, 1981 as cited in Ryan et al., 2005). Ryan et al. (2005) note that formal volunteering is most often demonstrated as a means to address needs of a collectivity in the context of a formal organization. Formal volunteering is separate from informal volunteering, because it moves beyond meeting a mere interpersonal obligation to help a friend.

Ryan et al. (2005) offer two explanations for why citizens participate in formal volunteering behavior: personal interests and social embeddedness. Fukuyama (1995) and Bellah et al. (1985) are examples of theorists who use Rational Choice Theory to describe why citizens volunteer due to their personal interests. These authors, in particular, argue that citizens make a purposive, rational choice to volunteer when they are faced with constraints from social norms. These social norms establish a certain expectation that a citizen volunteer, and thus, apply pressures to that citizen. This reaction to social norm pressure is why, according to theorists like Fukuyama and Bellah, people make a rational choice out of personal interest to volunteer. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) further the rational choice discussion by noting the impact of place on self-interests. People's self-interests are "welded together into a higher form of

consciousness [when citizens] find themselves affected by common events in a particular time and place” (pp. 1325 – 1327).

Social embeddedness theorists, however, argue that citizens choose to volunteer out of the social relations they are “embedded” in. Granovetter (1985) notes that personal dyadic social ties and multiple dyadic relationships (networks) influence volunteering. When people have access to information regarding how they can be of assistance, they are more likely to volunteer. And, the reason people have access to that information in the first place is due to their personal relationships (Granovetter, 1982). Gould (1993) and Putnam (2000) echo Granovetter regarding the influence of personal relationships on volunteering behavior. Gould (1993) remarks that social ties “make individual’s decisions about participating in collective action interdependent” (p. 182). Barnes and Sheppard (1992) point out that community sentiments shared by community members influence formal volunteering behavior, because these members have similar experiences and have repeated social interactions.

In 1998, Bell examined the “comingling effects” (p. 291) of personal interest and social embeddedness on formal volunteering behavior. Bell (1998) argues that collective action (the demonstration of formal volunteering) ensues when the actors feel *both* solidarity of interests and solidarity of sentiments with each other. The interaction of the two is the basis of what mobilizes a community. Bell calls this interaction the “dialogue of solidarities” (p. 182) and contends that the idea of “community” is produced when sentiment and interest have mutual influence on collective action.

Ryan et al. (2005) use the term “community attachment” as a framework for discussing the “dialogue of solidarities”, because community attachment refers to a

person's sentimental feelings towards the community and the people residing in it. Using purely quantitative data from a 1994 statewide survey of residents in 99 Iowa counties, Ryan et al. examined the influence of community attachment on voluntary citizen participation in rural community improvement projects. The results indicated that formal social ties (ties through a formal organization), strong informal ties (friends), weak informal ties (acquaintances), interest, and sentiment all have a significant effect on predicting voluntary participation. Voluntary participation occurs *primarily* as a result of formal ties, and, interestingly enough, formal ties occur *primarily* as a result of weak informal ties. In addition, weak informal ties have the largest impact on interest as well as sentiment. Ryan et al. (2005) aimed to advance the field by proposing that face-to-face encounters (social ties) contribute to the idea of community attachment, and both lead to formal volunteering. Stated another way, social resources that are converted into social capital supply the necessary tools to build community attachment, and the combination of the two have an impact on collective action.

The Connection Between Social Capital and Sense of Community (Community Attachment)

Social capital

Among academics, social capital's inauguration is a debated topic. Some refer to Hanifan (1916) as being the first to use the term "social capital" to describe assets such as good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse. Others say Durkheim (1893/1947) was the original to emphasize a person's connection to the community. Most scholars agree, however, that Bourdieu (1986) was first to conceptualize the value of social capital and Coleman (1988, 1990) was first to give it a clear theoretical

framework through empirical examination (Office of National Statistics, 2001).

Bourdieu discusses social capital in terms of “cultural reproduction”, defined as “the complex ideological and cultural processes that reproduce social forms such as racism, gender bias, authority structures, attitudes, values, and norms” (Zacharakis & Flora, 2005, p. 293). Bourdieu (1986) contends that social capital leads to unequal access to resources and unequal distribution of power and that culture mediates how class societies are reproduced. Coleman, in 1988, focused on the structure of social relations and how they relate to human capital. Coleman (1988) describes social capital as “a particular kind of resource available to an actor...Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors” (p. S98). The commonality between Bourdieu and Coleman’s definition is the beneficiary of the social capital resource—the individual.

Putnam (1993, 2000) and Woolcock & Narayan (2000) propose a ‘collective benefit’ in their definitions of social capital. In his 20-year, quasi-experimental study of subnational government in Italian regions, Putnam (1993) first made his case for social capital by saying, “Voluntary cooperation is easier in a community that has inherited a substantial stock of social capital in the form of norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement. Social capital here refers to features of social organizations, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (p. 167). Putnam notes that social capital is not the private property of the persons who benefit from it, but is considered a public good. Woolcock and Narayan, in 2000, sought to provide a more formal definition of social capital: “Social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (p. 226).

These scholars' (Putnam and Woolcock & Narayan) definitions of social capital present the community (rather than the individual) as the primary unit of analysis and beneficiary of the social capital resource. Delineating the beneficiaries of social capital among its definitions provides a foundation to bridge social capital with other conceptual frameworks, such as 'sense of community'.

Sense of community (community attachment)

In the community psychology literature, "community attachment" is considered the same thing as "sense of community" (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Prezzo et al., 2001; Sarason, 1974). As mentioned previously, 'sense of community' (or community attachment) refers to a person's affective feelings towards his/her community. McMillan and Chavis (1986) define 'sense of community' as being comprised of four elements: (1) Membership—A sense of belonging to a particular group; (2) Influence—The mutually influential relationship between community and its members; (3) Integration and Fulfillment of Needs—The reinforcement, positive and continual, members receive from their community; and, (4) Shared Emotional Connection—The shared history that community members believe they have with each other. Theodori (2000) raises some conceptual concerns regarding the level of analysis in the 'sense of community' field. The level of analysis across studies addressing this topic range anywhere from 'neighborhood' to 'community'. Theodori suggests that any examination of community attachment should identify 'community' as the level of analysis. The notion of 'community' is the common thread between social capital and sense of community. Capitalizing on this common thread presents an opportunity to combine the conceptual fabrics of social capital and sense of community.

The interaction between social capital and sense of community

Pooley, Cohen, & Pike (2005) examined the theoretical linkage between social capital and sense of community using qualitative and quantitative research from four case studies. The authors used 'sense of community' as a framework for investigating ways that social capital may be realized in communities. From their study, Pooley, Cohen, & Pike contend that an opportunity exists to bring the two concepts together to enhance how 'community' is understood: "Sense of community allows us to understand the individual's connection to the community, which is central to the concept of social capital. Although community psychology embraces sense of community, the definition of sense of community may inform the level of social capital within a community" (p. 78). Kilpatrick, Field, & Falk (2003), in their analysis of social capital literature, also suggest that, in order to connect community development with social capital, researchers must use the 'collective benefit' definitions of social capital, as presented by Putnam and Woolcock & Farayan. Ryan et al. (2005) propose that community attachment be viewed as another form of social capital for further research as long as social capital is viewed as a resource for not only the individual, but also the community. Ryan et al. refer to this as "community social capital." Utilizing a combined conceptual framework of social capital and sense of community, a "community social capital" framework, allows for a richer description of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. The "community social capital" framework presents a freedom to describe the impact youth engagement has on both the youth and the community as well as the interdependent impact *between* the youth and the community.

How Social Capital and Sense of Community Interact with the Concept of Youth

Among the landmark social capital scholars (Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam), youth are viewed as passive recipients of their parents' social capital. Putnam (2000) highlights the involvement of parental social capital on children's development and educational achievement. Coleman (1990) notes the importance of social capital for children, but describes children as future beneficiaries of parental social capital. Bourdieu (1986) also discusses children's social capital as a futuristic entity rather than a present one. These three views of youth and their relationship to social capital create a deficit model, which is rejected by contemporary youth social capital scholars (Holland, Reynolds, & Weller, 2007; Morrow, 1999, 2000; Offer & Schneider, 2007; Schaefer & McDaniel, 2004). These academics maintain that youth are active generators of their own social capital. For example, Holland, Reynolds, & Weller (2007) drew from three Families and SC ESRC Research Group studies at London South Bank University to examine the significance of social capital in young people's life transitions. The authors found that youth utilize social resources and networks to become more independent social actors in new school settings as well to pursue further education and employment opportunities.

Morrow (2000) explored the advantages and disadvantages of the social capital framework in her investigation of adolescent well-being. Among the advantages, Morrow found that using a social capital framework to study adolescent well-being enabled the research to focus on social context and that adolescents' view of their social world was in disagreement with adults' preoccupations with the age group. Among the disadvantages, Morrow found that Putnam's (1993) conceptualization of social capital

relates to a community that has geographic boundaries. Morrow notes that adolescents define community in many different ways. In the present study, however, youth development, in particular their leadership development, is being studied in the *context* of which it's being developed (i.e. the community). Thus, the conceptual "boundary" of community is already defined. Morrow points out another disadvantage in that Putnam's (1993) emphasis on civic participation is limited to youth given that they are on the outside of democratic structures. Morrow notes, "These young people may feel reasonably well-supported by networks of friends and family members, but the balance seems to go the other way when one considers their sense of self-efficacy and participation in their neighborhood which is clearly very limited" (p. 150). The youth in the present study, however, are actively engaged in their communities and, as such, have an active voice in its democracy. Thus, by defining 'community' and involving youth in democratic structures via community engagement, social capital is an appropriate framework for exploring youth development.

While a social capital framework is useful for examining the process of how youth leadership develops, using social capital alone slights the influence community engagement has on that process. Schaefer-McDaniel (2004) wrote of the importance of community in social capital talk in that 'sense of belonging' to a community forms a significant part of a young person's social capital framework. Holland, Reynolds, & Weller (2007) also found that place and community are valuable to the social capital debates. The amount of social capital the youth accrued through their tight-knit community networks determined how well they could bridge over into new networks during times of transition.

The 'sense of community' literature accounts for the impact of community on adolescent development. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory underscores the notion that young people grow up in *communities*, not in isolation. As a child grows older, the interaction he/she has with the community matures, thus introducing him/her to a larger range of systems, including family, school, peer group, and community (Pooley et al., 2002). Pretty et al. were the first to suggest in their 1994 study that the 'sense of community' concept was relevant to adolescents. In 1996, the authors expanded their 1994 study to further examine how sense of community impacts adolescent well-being. Multiple regression and correlate analysis of quantitative data from 228 adolescents indicated that 'social support' and 'sense of community' were distinctive aspects of adolescents' community context. Sense of community was also the primary correlate with subjective well-being in the adolescents (well-being measured by level of happiness, enjoyment of life, worry, and perceived efficacy). Sense of community's correlation with each measure of well-being was significant at the $p < .01$ level.

While both social capital and sense of community frameworks have been utilized in the study of youth development, a combination of the two frameworks has not been utilized to study any aspect of youth development (based on the limits of this literature search). Putnam (1995) charged future research to sort out the dimensions of social capital by asking what types of organizations and networks most effectively encompass or generate social capital. Portes, in 1998, called for an analysis of social capital grounded in a contextual framework (in the case of the present study, the contextual framework is the community). Morrow (1999) challenged the field to focus more theoretical and empirical attention to investigating social capital outside of the family. In

the sense of community literature, Pooley et al. (2002) noted that research lacks in understanding how youth develop their concept of community and sense of community. This study aims to advance the field by utilizing a combined framework of social capital and sense of community (as suggested by Ryan et al.'s (2005) "community social capital" concept) to describe youth development. Combining a social capital framework with a sense of community framework for the purposes of this study allows for a thorough examination of: (1) how youth leadership develops through relationships between youth and adult community leaders, (2) how the *context* of community (in which this engagement initiative occurs) impacts the process of this development, and (3) how the community develops from engaging its youth in community leadership.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Approach and Tradition Rationale

In this inquiry, the study revolved around youth leadership development in the *context* of community. Examination of youth leadership development was not possible without the context of its place within the community. Bogdan and Taylor note the emphasis of context in the qualitative research tradition: “[Qualitative research] directs itself at settings and the individuals within those settings *holistically*; that is, the subject of the study, be it an organization or an individual, is not reduced to an isolated variable or to an hypothesis, but is viewed instead as part of a whole” (as cited in Hatch, 2002, p. 6; emphasis added). In addition, since no body of academic literature was found that directly related to this topic of interest, an inductive approach appeared most relevant to the study. Hatch (2002) poses that, in qualitative research, inductive methods are applied to an everyday, but subjective world. Because of the holistic focus and inductive need for this study, qualitative methodology seemed the best fit.

With a need for inductive processes in this study, a grounded theory tradition was most appropriate—especially since that inductive need relates to an understanding of a developmental process. Morse and Richards assert that, in grounded theory assumptions, the research questions should reflect an interest in a process and that the researcher should identify stages of that process of change (2002).

Glaser and Strauss were the first pioneers of grounded theory research. These two scholars believed that theory should be “grounded” in data taken from the field, rather than coming to the field with a theory a priori. Strauss and Corbin went on in later years

to prescribe a more structured approach to grounded theory (Creswell, 1998). The goal of this study was to present a model or schema that would describe the process of how youth leadership develops through a community engagement experience. Creswell (1998) describes grounded theory as a study whose intent is “to generate a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to a particular situation. This situation is one in which individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon” (p. 56). As mentioned previously, many communities, rural in particular, are pursuing youth engagement activities in response to both youth outmigration and a lack of community engagement from their young adults. Many communities would like to start youth engagement initiatives; however, there exists no conceptual framework from which to start. By developing a model of youth engagement, the hope is to present a conceptual framework for recommending effective designs and direction for youth engagement initiatives to inquiring communities.

Personal Biases

This study was approached from a postpositivist paradigm. The intent in this study was to discern the process of how youth leadership is developed through community engagement. In order to gain that knowledge, garnering the perspectives of the participants was vital as it related to the engagement experience in the community of context. Because perspectives are always formed out of personal perceptual bias (Bowditch & Buono, 1997), the reality of the extent of youth leadership development was only approximated. This basic assumption fits directly into the postpositivist paradigm (Hatch, 2002).

Personally, the researcher's bias in this study stems from a career in leadership development. Currently, the researcher works in a leadership development organization on a college campus. In particular, the researcher's duties include the execution of a leadership program for preteens. This program aims to develop the leadership talents of outstanding preteens in order that they may expand their capacities to be difference makers in their schools, families, and community. In 2004, the program expanded to a rural community within Nebraska. This particular community hopes to use this program as a springboard towards engaging these young leaders in community decision-making boards in future years. So, for the researcher, having a conceptual understanding of how youth leadership talents are developed through community engagement is very necessary not only for the researcher's work with this rural community, but also for the researcher's work with communities in the future.

Sampling Procedure

The participants for this study were selected based on their involvement in a program called HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC), in particular, HTC's "youth pillar". HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) is a program that provides a comprehensive strategy for long-term rural community sustainability by presenting a come back/give back approach to rural community building. The program was developed and field-tested by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, the Nebraska Community Foundation, the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, and the Center for Rural Affairs—organizations that have years of experience in rural community development.

HTC encourages communities to action in four areas (or pillars): leadership, youth, entrepreneurship, and charitable assets. The youth pillar is the context of focus for

this study. HTC teaches participants in their community sites how to positively engage their youth in order to nurture a sense of ownership and vested interest in the community's future leaders. The HTC youth pillar focuses on three elements of youth engagement—*community leadership and service, entrepreneurship education and career development, and adult support*.

The HTC project has operations in nine Nebraska counties. When a community decides to engage in the HTC process, 'Phase 1' commences with a site visit by the HTC staff coupled with a preliminary assessment. The communities have to raise a certain amount of money for 'Phase 1', but the money raised is matched by HTC using Kellogg grant money. If the community and HTC decide after the preliminary assessment that HTC will be a good fit, the community signs a contract. So, before a community even becomes an HTC community, the residents must have social and economic investment. In 'Phase 2', HTC helps the community leaders write a comprehensive strategy for the four pillars. This phase is where a steering committee of volunteers (within the community) is established for each pillar, and the community determines its priorities. Each steering committee's job is to organize and direct plans for the community within each of the four pillars (HomeTown Competitiveness, n.d.). In 'Phase 3', the community becomes mostly self-sufficient with HTC serving as more of a specialized assistant for any technical needs. In all three phases, the community must have social and economic investment.

Morse and Richards suggest choosing the "best", most optimal example of the phenomenon and setting of interest (2002). The intended audience for this study is rural communities who have an interest in engaging youth. Because of that intended audience,

studying young leaders in the context of rural communities was most appropriate.

Although these HTC communities may not have the best examples of youth engagement initiatives, they are the best examples of youth engagement initiatives in a *rural* community in the state of Nebraska. Plus, these initiatives ensue within the same conglomerate (HTC). Thus, the setting and sample were purposively selected.

Population and sample

The study participants were selected from the following HTC Communities (pseudonyms utilized) that have strong youth pillar initiatives: (a) Tyler County, (b) Riley County, and (c) Lefler County. The sample was pulled from the population of those community individuals (i.e. youth, adults, and returned young adults) who were participating in some way with the local HTC program.

Tyler County has been with HTC since 2004 and has a group of about 50 youth who represent a variety of youth organizations in the community. The group is led by an adult mentor in the school and has monthly meetings. In terms of *community leadership and service*, this youth task force elects representatives to certain community boards. For example, the youth task force elected two of their own to serve on the Chamber of Commerce board. In terms of *entrepreneurship education and career development*, the local Rotary Club has career development through job shadowing. In addition, Tyler County started a program called Junior Achievement as an after school program for upper elementary students. In terms of *adult support*, a core team of about eight to ten adults are involved in the task force events and likewise in the Rotary job shadowing. Young adults who have recently returned or moved to the community are involved in all four HTC task forces. A “Young Adult Welcome Committee” is also in place that helps to

“plug” new people into the community (L. Heinert, personal communication, November, 17, 2006).

Three youth participants, one adult participant, and one young adult participant from Tyler County were selected for this study. All three youth came from this youth task force, but this subsample was stratified in terms of task force activities. One student was elected by his youth task force peers to represent them on a local community board. Another student was part of the youth task force, but was more involved in a spin-off project that dealt with preventing teen violence. The third student was one of the pioneers for getting the youth task force started and is now an officer for the task force. The HTC Site Coordinator for Tyler County was also a participant in the study as well as a young adult who moved back to Tyler County and is involved with the youth task force.

Riley County has also been with HTC since 2004, but does not have an organized group of youth that “meets” per say. The HTC Site Coordinator does coordinate, however, with the schools and existing youth organizations. The youth pillar efforts have been successful when connected with the schools. In terms of *leadership and service roles*, the community had a student-run intergenerational dialogue in summer, 2006. Two representatives from every school in the county worked on this intergenerational dialogue. An attempt was made a few years ago to have youth seats on the City Council, but the effort was not successful. In addition, three teens participated in a local program conducted by the University of Nebraska Extension Division. In terms of *entrepreneurship education and career development*, the local high school currently has not applied for grant support to start up an entrepreneurship program. The local junior high school, however, has hired a local businessperson to implement a new career

education program. The Site Coordinator was asked to provide a list of projects on which the students could work. The local parochial school does have an entrepreneurship class. Nothing was mentioned in terms of *adult support*, but young adults are becoming more and more involved with the local Chamber of Commerce activities. Many young adults are also currently involved with the Extension program (L. Heinert, personal communication, November 17, 2006).

Four youth were participants in this study from Riley County. Two youth were involved in planning the intergenerational dialogue, and the other two were part of the Extension program. The Site Coordinator for Riley County participated in the study, as well as one of the coordinators for the Extension program, the coordinator for the intergenerational dialogue, and the coordinator for the junior high program. In addition, a young adult who moved back to the community after a number of years also participated in the study.

Lefler County has the longest history with HTC considering it has been an HTC community since 2002. In terms of *leadership and service roles* in Lefler County, a program exists in the county where youth and adult leaders come together once a month for leadership development activities. In addition, the group also puts together a community improvement project. In terms of *entrepreneurship education and career development*, local efforts such as a 4-H Landscaping business and a business class at the local high school are the main hubs of this type of education and development. In terms of *adult support*, the local media outlets are highlighting student leadership and entrepreneurship efforts. Local business and organizations also provide scholarships for young local entrepreneurs. Lefler City, a town located within Lefler County, indicates

that many young people have moved back and are getting involved. For example, three young adults in the community are candidates for a Board of Directors at the local hospital. A newcomers group is also in place in Lefler County whose purpose is to help newcomers find their niche within the community (L. Heinert, personal communication, November 17, 2006).

Seven youth participated in the study, all of which are part of the aforementioned program. Two young adults were also participants in the study. One of them was previously involved in the same youth program, but also is on a task force devoted to young adult attraction. The other young adult is a local teacher who has numerous connections to the program.

Using the terms Hatch (2002) describes, the sample for this study was both homogenous and stratified. The sample was homogenous, because each participant was selected based on his/her involvement with HTC. The sample was stratified based on criteria of age and role in the youth pillar activities.

The purpose in this study was to look at the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement experiences. In order to provide a rich description of this process of development, the power of multiple perspectives was thoroughly considered. For example, the first research question regarding strategies used to engage youth was answered differently by youth than the adults. The answers that the youth provided brought insight into the strategies that worked to get them engaged, but the answers the adults provided gave insight into the history and justification behind the strategies. The young adults also provided a fresh perspective to determine the strategies *necessary* for certain desired outcomes (i.e. bringing young leaders back to the

community). The idea was to create a *holistic* perspective in providing a rich description of the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. The following table is a pictorial view of the sample selection:

Table 1

Sample selected from HTC participant population

Sample	Community		
	Tyler County	Riley County	Lefler County
Youth	1. Involved in the task force with adult community leaders and elected to local community board 2. Involved in the task force, but also heavily involved in a spin-off project dedicated to preventing teen violence 3. Pioneer in starting the task force and is now an officer	1. and 2. Helped plan the intergenerational dialogue 3. and 4. Involved in the Extension program	1. through 7. Involved in task force of youth and adult leaders
Adults	1. Local Site Coordinator for HTC	1. Local Site Coordinator for HTC 2. One of the coordinators for the Extension program 3. Coordinator for the intergenerational dialogue 4. Coordinator for the junior high program	1. Local high school teacher
Returned Young Adults	1. Involved with the youth task force and the coordinator for the spin-off project	1. Involved with Extension program among other community development projects	1. Involved with task force as well as a grant dedicated to attracting young adults to move back

Data Collection Strategies

The “gatekeeper” to these HTC communities was the coordinator for the youth pillar activities in all of the HTC communities. In addition, other gatekeepers included the counterpart volunteer committee members dealing with youth engagement in Tyler County, Riley County, and Lefler County.

Since a well-rounded perspective on how youth leadership develops through community engagement was desired, data were collected in the form of interviews. Semi-structured, half-hour interviews with each of the aforementioned participants were conducted and audio taped. Each interview was triangulated via the interviewee to provide confirmation of the documented interview.

Guiding questions were prepared for the interview, but leads presented by the respondent were followed. The types of questions asked were descriptive and structural. Contrasting-type questions were asked during probing. These types of questions were modeled after Hatch’s recommendations in developing essential questions (2002). The purpose of the study was not outlined to each participant, and the participants were informed of the “no right or wrong answer” rule. (To see the Interview Protocols, see Appendix A.)

Observing the engagement activities in each of the HTC communities was vital perspective on the development of youth leadership. Through an observation, the phenomenon of interest was seen in the primary rather than secondary through an interview. Both of these factors allowed overall data enrichment that could not have been garnered through interviews alone. The challenge was to attempt to develop the understanding an insider while describing the process as an outsider (Merriam, 1998).

Observation findings were also used as material for future interviews. The research intentions and purpose were made known to the group; however the researcher was not a participant in the group activities. Incidents of phenomenon were recorded using an observation protocol. Recording equipment was not used for the observation. (To see the Observation Protocol, see Appendix B).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher worked with the HTC Coordinator and the HTC community volunteers to contact the potential informants. The potential youth and adult participants were contacted by phone before observing the engagement activities to explain what the study involved, what was expected of them, and what they could expect from me. They were also asked what questions they had of the study and then were asked to participate in the study. All gave verbal consent over the phone, and I also met with them briefly before the engagement activity to obtain their signature on informed consent documents (IRB #: 2007-02-223 EP).

Hatch describes reciprocity as an ethical issue in that researchers should specify what he/she contributes to the bargain (2002). The study was explained to both interviewees as well as the importance of their perspective in the design of this model. The objective was to explain what the study involved without creating a “Hawthorne Effect.” Hatch also describes the necessity for having an exit strategy from the research site (2002). An informal debriefing with the study participants was scheduled for after the project’s completion.

Data Analysis

Since this was a grounded theory study, the analysis procedure was the most rigorous portion (due to its systematic nature). The data analysis procedure followed the standard format as outlined in Strauss & Corbin (1998): The process began with **open coding** where initial categories were formed regarding the development of youth leadership in community engagement. Then the data was assembled using **axial coding** to identify a paradigm model, explaining a central concept to the phenomenon and its causal conditions, action/interaction strategies taken to manage that central concept, the intervening conditions to those strategies, the contexts of those strategies, and the consequences (or outcomes) that resulted. Third, the categories were integrated in the axial coding in order to present hypotheses and to start developing a model using **selective coding**. Finally, a model was fully developed to describe the development of youth leadership through community engagement using the findings from the analysis procedure described above. From the model, designs and directions were proposed for youth engagement initiatives along with hypotheses for further study.

Open Coding and Axial Coding

Open coding is the “destruction” phase of the analysis, because this phase is where phenomena within the data are examined, named, and categorized. From the examination, incidents in the data are named with “codes”, which are identified and developed through a process of asking questions and making comparisons. Similar incidents are labeled and grouped to become categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding procedures produce categories, subcategories, properties, and dimensions (Creswell, 2005).

Axial coding is the “reconstruction” phase of the analysis, because this phase is where data are put back together by making connections between categories. “Open coding fractures the data and allows one to identify some categories, their properties, and dimensional locations. Axial coding puts those data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). By making connections, axial coding expands open coding to develop categories further. Axial coding develops categories in terms of causal conditions that give rise to it, the context of the central phenomenon, the action/interaction strategies used to manage and respond to the phenomenon, and the consequences (or outcomes) that resulted based on what strategies were taken. While Strauss & Corbin (1998) recognize open and axial coding as distinct procedures, they also note the simultaneous nature these two coding procedures have during analysis.

Open coding and axial coding procedures transpired simultaneously during the analysis of this study’s data. Open coding initially consisted of reading through interview transcripts and observation memos and noting every minute incident of a potentially pertinent phenomenon. The coding was progressive in nature, because the first interview’s codes provided a framework to compare the second interview, and so on... Each interview was coded in full and then compared to the next interview in succession. Collecting data in three similar contexts (rural communities utilizing HTC as a vehicle to engage youth) aided tremendously in the open coding process, because it allowed for easy comparison of similar phenomenon. Although the properties and dimensions differed, the three communities at study experienced similar outcomes in terms of youth

and community development. The list of initial codes formed from the initial open coding is found in Table 2.

Table 2

Initial open coding categories

Categories A – K	Categories L – Z
Ability to Capitalize on New Leadership Potential	Learning the Expertise of Other People
Ability to Communicate Ideas, Views, and Opinions in Front of Others	Multi-generational Perspective
Ability to Perpetuate Connections, New Attitudes, and New Community Assumptions	Multiple Community Youth
Being Asked to Participate	New People to Draw From
Community	Organized and Facilitated by “Champion”
Community Assumptions	Ownership and Responsibility
Community Awareness	Perception and Attitude Change
Community Engagement	Perception of Opportunity (Present and Future)
Confidence and Empowerment	Presentation of Opportunity
Connections	Purpose, Function, Task, and Work
Continued Action	Real-World Learning
Contribution of Youth Views	Reality Awareness
Facilitating Older Peers	Recognition from the Community
Hope	Resources
Idea Enabling	Sense of Pride and Community Spirit
Idea Generation	Supportive Environment
Idea Prioritization	Trust
Initial Attitudes	Working Together

Simultaneous axial coding became necessary, because incidents of phenomenon within the data had the potential to fit into two separate categories. The incidents differed, however, due to their purposes and/or the incidents that caused it. Thus, categories with similar features had to delineate where they sat within the paradigm

model. For example, many incidents within the data related to the code of ‘perception and attitude change’. However, some attitude and perception changes were discussed in terms of what happened *as a result* of engaging youth and other attitude and perception changes were discussed as a cause for why a person engaged in the first place.

In order to identify where categories fit within the paradigm model, axial coding consisted of scrutinizing the data using a few informal questions:

- (1) What drove these people (in particular, youth) to get engaged in community leadership initially?
- (2) What did the youth and adult leaders engage in when they came together to work on community improvement?
- (3) What changed as a result of the youth and the adult leaders coming together?
 - (a) In the individuals involved?
 - (b) In the community?
- (4) Why did the changes occur? What factors contributed to changes within the individuals? The community?

Applying these four questions to the initial coding categorized the data more appropriately. The ‘community engagement’ code suggested itself naturally as the core concept of the paradigm model. The other codes all referred to community engagement, which makes sense considering it was the central focus of the study from the outset.

Question 1 helped to determine which data incidents fit more as causal conditions and which refer to events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of the core concept (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Meticulous analysis of the data was required to determine whether incidents *drove* an informant to engage in the community or occurred

as a result of engaging in the community. Often, data incidents could have argued as both. ‘Community assumptions’ and ‘initial attitudes’ merged to become one causal condition, because they were often discussed interchangeably among informants.

‘Connections’ also emerged as a causal condition along with ‘being asked to participate.’ ‘Being asked to participate’ served as both a causal condition as well as an interaction strategy. ‘Being asked to participate’ often drove people to engage in the first place, but was also a strategy employed to encourage community engagement by those leaders already involved.

Question 2 helped to further develop the central phenomenon of community engagement in terms of action/interaction strategies, which are defined as strategies utilized to manage, handle, carry out, or respond to a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Having a ‘purpose, function, task, and work’ appeared to be the main strategy employed when the youth and adult leaders came together for community improvement. ‘Contribution of youth views’ and ‘working together’ also emerged as strategies, with ‘idea generation’, ‘idea prioritization’, ‘reality awareness’, connecting to ‘resources’, and ‘idea enabling’ stationed as properties of ‘working together.’

Question 3 served as a partition to the data to determine which incidents, in particular which attitudes, assumptions, and/or perceptions, *caused* engagement in the community and which incidents occurred as a *result* of being engaged in the community. The incidents that occurred as a result became the consequences in the paradigm model, otherwise known as the outcomes that surface due to the action/interaction strategies taken. In terms of individual outcomes, ‘ownership and responsibility’ merged with ‘empowerment and confidence’, because they were often described together in the data.

‘Community awareness’ and ‘perception and attitude change’ also fell into individual outcomes. ‘Ability to capitalize on new leadership potential’ and ‘ability to perpetuate connections, new attitudes, and new community assumptions’ appeared to fit best as outcomes experienced by the community as an entity. ‘New people to draw from’ fell in as a subcategory of ‘ability to capitalize on new leadership potential’, because it served as a bedrock to a community’s capacity to develop leadership. ‘Community recognition of youth’ fell in as a subcategory of ‘ability to perpetuate connections’, because it was the vehicle by which this ability surfaced.

Question 4 raised the intervening conditions within the data, described as the conditions which bear upon the action/interaction strategies. These intervening conditions can include anything from time to space to culture, and more (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). ‘Organized and facilitated by “champion” (“champion” described as a coordinator)’ as well as “resources” immediately emerged as conditions that explained both individual and community change.

The initial codes not mentioned, like ‘hope’ and ‘facilitating older peers’ appeared redundant to other codes and/or did not have sufficient saturation in the data. The axial coding outline which shows all of the codes and their place within the paradigm model can be found in Figure 1.

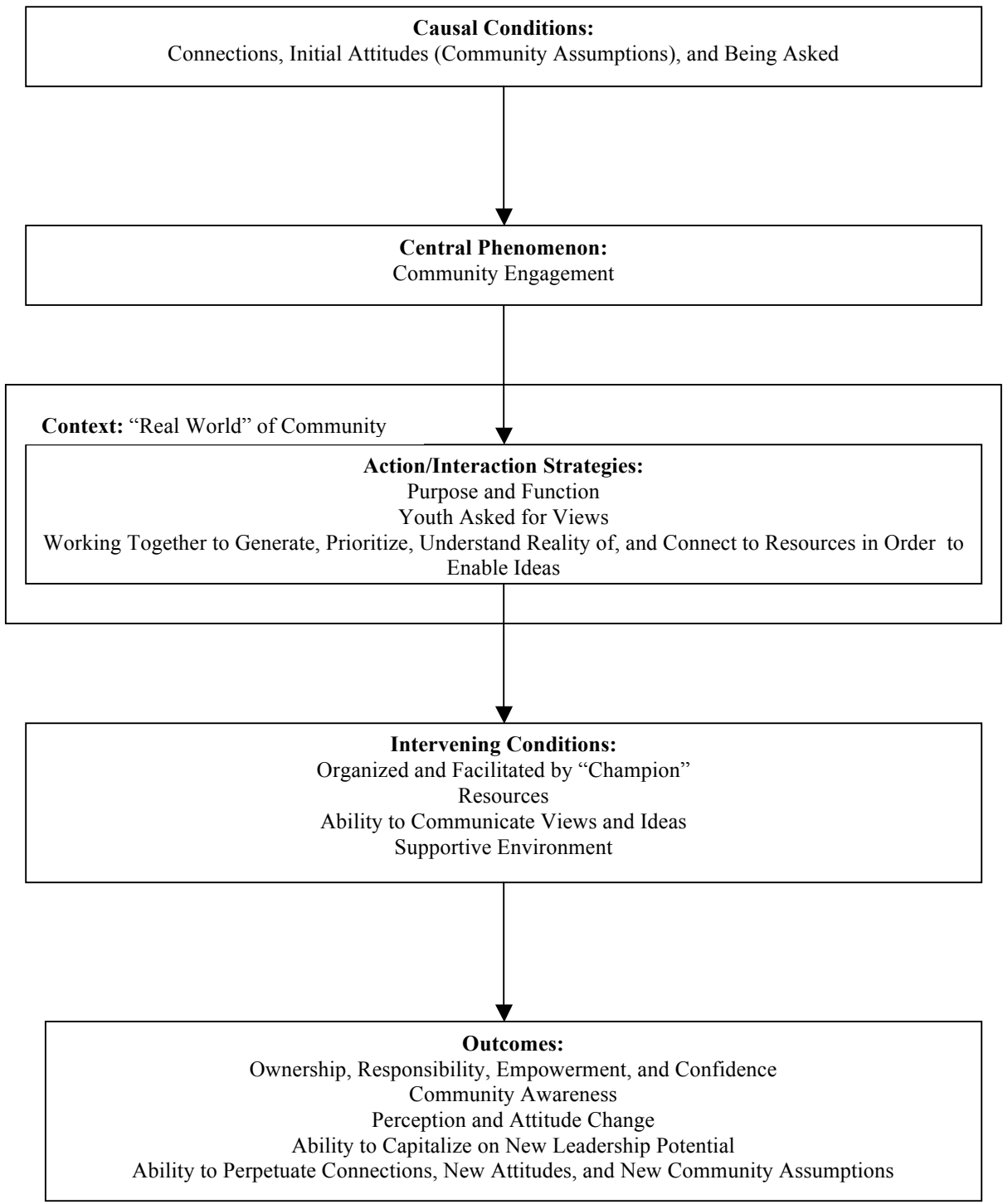


Figure 1. Initial axial coding diagram.

Selective coding

Selective coding is the final phase in data analysis and is where the previous coding procedures work together to produce a grounded theory (Creswell, 2005). During this phase, the researcher examines interrelationships between the causal conditions and central phenomenon, how this influences the selection of action/interaction strategies, and what outcomes emerge from those strategies. Selective coding is the process of determining the *story*. Choosing the most relevant story is more difficult than it seems, because many story lines could be followed, but the investigator must choose the story which is most relevant to the research questions.

In the case of this study, the most relevant story chosen revolved around explaining the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. The data presented the most revealing story about how community engagement influences leadership development among the youth as well as the community. The emerging theory provided a story of, first, how social resources influence voluntary participation within the community (community engagement). The story continued by describing how that voluntary participation is where the social resources mobilize in order to create social capital. The story concluded by demonstrating how that social capital is converted to individual leadership development as well as community development.

The product of the data analysis was a model used to tell the “story” of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. The model, thoroughly grounded in the data, formed the foundation for propositions concerning the relationship between

leadership development (within individuals and within the community) and community engagement.

Data Verification

Member checking (Merriam, 1998) was utilized with all of the informants on what was observed and what was said in the interview. Informants were solicited to read through their transcript and provide feedback on errors. By using interviews, observations, and the unobtrusive data, *triangulation* (Merriam, 1998) was also used as another validation procedure. Triangulation was employed this way in order to create a more holistic approach rather than pooling judgment based on a number of researchers.

As noted in the 'Personal Biases' section, the researcher's career revolves around youth leadership development, thus a certain level of anxiety existed about being the sole researcher in this area as well as the thought of reaching findings due to an interpretive analysis. In an effort to assuage these fears, *peer examination* was utilized (Merriam, 1998) to ensure the validity of the findings. Another graduate student in an unrelated department perused the findings and subsequently commented. Utilizing peer examination requires an *audit trail* (Merriam, 1998) to indicate the thought process behind the discoveries.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis Results

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to construct a grounded theory for how youth develop through community engagement. From the theory, designs and directions for developing youth leadership through community engagement are presented.

The following question was central to this grounded theory study: How is youth leadership developed as a result of being engaged in community leadership? The following sub-questions guided and directed the study:

1. What are the common strategies used to engage youth in the community in terms of community leadership and service, entrepreneurship education, career development, and adult support?
2. What leadership skills do youth gain from the engagement experience?
 - a. Do these skills align with the skills necessary for community leadership in the future? If so, how?
 - b. As a result of this skill attainment, what evidence is there that these skills are being used in the community?
3. What are the attitudes of youth in regard to civic engagement as a result of being involved in community leadership?
4. How has the community been effected by engaging their youth?
 - a. Have adults changed their perspectives? What is the evidence of that?

These research questions became a means to an end rather than a bedrock to the study. Due to the inductive methodological processes in this study, each interview and

observation led to new questions as well as a need to revamp old questions. So, by the end of the study, the initial research questions became less relevant; however, the main purpose of the study remained close intact.

A total of 23 participants shared their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about their experiences in community engagement. This chapter highlights each component within the emerging grounded theory of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. The emerging grounded theory is presented at the end of the chapter as a graphical model in Figure 2 and is coupled with a summary of the results.

Central Phenomenon—Community Engagement

From the analysis of the data, the most pertinent story in response to the research question emerged as a description of how community engagement influences leadership development for the youth as well as within the community. In the case of this study, community engagement can be described as formal volunteering where youth and adults work together to improve their community. The most important feature to community engagement as discussed in this study is *youth*. While formal volunteering is the common action taken by each individual involved, it's the influence of youth and adults volunteering *together* for community improvement that makes this phenomenon central to the study.

Involving youth in community leadership (for the purposes of bettering the community) was the key component to this study's findings. In particular, the *relationship* between youth and adults through the community engagement process had a unique influence on not only what caused youth and adults to come together in their

community in the first place, but also what caused the changes in both the individuals involved and the community itself.

Causal Conditions

Causal conditions explain how the central phenomenon developed initially. They [the conditions] identify the how, the who, the what, the when, and the why of the central phenomenon genesis. In the present study, connections, being asked to participate, and community assumptions and initial attitudes served as the causes for why youth and adult leaders engaged in the community together in the first place. All three conditions in the data appeared distinct, yet equal, as contributors to why community engagement initiatives involving youth began in these three rural communities. The three causal conditions named here are further explained in the following sections.

Connections

The first question posed to each informant asked why he/she got involved in the community engagement initiative initially. *Every single* youth respondent pointed to a person of significance within the community who encouraged his/her participation.

The young leaders involved in the community engagement initiative in Lefler County, for example, all pointed to a person or a few people who encouraged them to get involved. Laura stated, “I got involved through my family. My brother did it last year. My aunt told me to do it—it’s a good experience.” Amy echoed the influence of family when she said, “I got involved from my mom. I never actually heard about it ‘til this year. She told me to do it.” Amanda joked, in fact, about the coercion sometimes used by parents to encourage involvement: “I actually didn’t want to do [the engagement initiative], but my mom made me do it, because she has taken the class and everything.

But, I've gotten a lot out of it." Reagan spoke of the influence of parents who are already involved with the engagement initiative in previous years: "My mom was in [the engagement initiative] last year, and she told me it was a good experience. She got a lot out of it, thought I would too." Amy mentioned further the influence of parents' involvement in the community: "My parents are, like, really big in the community. Like, my dad's on City Council, my mom is on the school board, so like, it really influences me to want to be involved also." When probed further about the influence of connections within the community, the students were quick to mention that it's not just parents who influence. Evan mused, "It's family, but in a small community, everyone's kinda family, your friends... You get influenced more outside than you do just with relations." Amanda echoed Evan's sentiments: "Even if your family isn't on a board or something, you know who's on the board."

The adults who engaged in the community also pointed to significant people in their lives who encouraged their involvement. Iris, a young adult who moved to her husband's hometown, noted the influence of connections to her involvement:

And then I moved to Tysonridge which is Harrison Communications now. And I worked there for a couple years, and that's where I got real interested in economic development, because I was right next door. I would always see Beverly and everybody coming and going, and I was like, 'Oh, this is kinda interesting.' I just kinda gradually, just through connections. Tyler (her husband) was friends with Bill's son in high school, so I knew Bill even before we moved here. There's so many little ways you're connected to everybody in town. It's kinda crazy.

Even those who spearheaded the engagement initiatives spoke of people who had a significant impact on their passion for community development. Ellen from Tyler County stated:

Actually, we have a local attorney here, Jodi Kamp, who has just been, she's just amazing. She was, you know, keeping me in the loop, just inviting me over to some of their things. They had a community foundation event where they were celebrating their different organizations and were just kind of celebrating their community. So she invited me over for that and invited me over for another event. And I just thought it was really awesome. And of course I was reading their local newspaper and reading about it there. So that's how I found out about that.

Not only did the level of connections within the community influence participation, but also the level of respect for those connections. Adrienne from Tyler County pointed to the factor 'respect' has on influencing participation when she said, "I actually used to baby sit for her children back when I was in high school, grade school. But she's just awesome about, you know, giving back to the community and being involved. So she's kind of a mentor to get me involved." Iris echoed Adrienne's comments when asked to explain how she got involved:

I first heard about it the first year when one of my coworkers took it. And she made it sound so exciting and fun. I kinda looked up to her anyway, and so I was like, 'Wow, this is something I need to do.' So the next year I moved over to this office and Bill Stuart (her boss) is big into economic development. I asked him if I could take it and he was thrilled to have me excited about it.

Iris also coupled the influence of respect with the influence extended involvement in the community (through spouse's career and kids) has on participation:

I know Belmont (her hometown) had a Chamber of Commerce, but it was not something that I really cared about. When I moved here, I suppose seeing people like Bill that I respected and Beverly—I think she's pretty cool too. I mean, I respect them and I guess I want to be involved in the things they are involved in. And now that we're here, we've got a business, we've got two boys, it's important for me to help keep work going.

Eric, a teacher in Lefler County, also spoke to the impact of extended involvement:

“As I’ve lived here, I’ve become a more prominent member of the community, because I know it’s important. You know, you start it out just graduating from college. You come in, you do your job, and you go home. Now I have kids in the system, my wife is a teacher at the elementary. You get involved in a lot of issues, and also being in the three sports, you know, you’re out there all the time talking with people, their kids. I guess it’s just a progression.”

The amount of social resources these youth and adult leaders have has played a significant role in encouraging their engagement in the community. Considering that nearly every respondent pointed to a *person* who influenced him/her to participate, the data provided adequate saturation to prove ‘connections’ as a cause to community engagement. The social resources the respondents pointed to came in all forms from formal ties within organizations or careers to strong informal ties (friends) to weak informal ties (acquaintances) within the community. In addition, those weak informal ties who were already engaged in the community often became formal ties when the respondents participated in the community engagement initiatives.

Being asked to participate

The amount and form of connections (social ties) matriculated into actual social resources once respondents were *asked* to formally participate in the community engagement initiative. The social ties became social resources at this time, because when the informants were asked to participate, those people (ties) became brokers to new opportunities. Two things were offered to the informants when asked to participate: (1) they [the informants] were presented with an opportunity to get involved, create change for the better, and to have a cause, and (2) they were presented with the possibility to

create future career opportunities. In the case of the youth, these future opportunities could create the possibility for them to come back.

For the youth, being asked was a simple affair. Elizabeth, an adult leader from Riley County, spoke of the process she took when asking the kids to get involved:

Yes, when we talked with these kids, we said that we were looking at a community project, it was going to culminate in a dialogue with five different generations, and this was going to be completed in five weeks. They were going to have two to three meeting times, would that fit into their schedule, realizing that high school kids have jobs and all kinds of summer activities and things going on. So, that's what they needed to know—is it worth their time to do something like this?

The students' responses were also quite succinct. Heather, a young leader from Riley County, said the following regarding her response to the “ask”: “Yeah, Sara Newmann called me and wanted to know if I would do it, and I was like, ‘Sure, why not?’” Another young leader, Stephanie, from Tyler County, spoke of the simple way in which she was asked to participate:

I think my mom was actually involved in it first, and then she kinda told us that we should try it. And the lady that first was running it was Darla Kropp, and I did a lot of work for her, just general things. And she called and wanted me to do stuff with her. So, I would go over to her house and like be cleaning and then we'd go to the meetings and stuff, and she would talk to me about stuff there.

While the act of asking was straightforward, its importance was noted by many of the adult informants. Alana from Riley County stated, “Some people need to be invited—that's okay. I think that's the job of those of us who are in leadership positions to do—make sure everybody's invited. Make sure people's talents are used properly.” David, another adult leader in Riley County, echoed Alana's comments when he said, “Another one that I learned through churches, through ownership, is that they become involved and become invested when they're asked. That's the other thing—they don't

feel connected because they're not asked.” Adrienne from Tyler County mentioned that there's more to it than just the “ask”: “First of all, I mean, asking them to come, explaining why we want them there. Letting them know, I guess, that we don't think they're, you know, a bunch of kids who don't care, who don't have great ideas. And then, I think just having the conversation with them and asking them to be involved and giving them reasons why.”

The adult leaders noted the importance of not only presenting a current opportunity to get involved, but also a future opportunity to come back. Iris from Lefler County stated:

I think they need to know that there are jobs available for them, or there are opportunities for them to start businesses. And if they want to start a business, there's a lot involved in that. They need support and the economic development office is great about that...I can't think of the saying, but if you see people doing it, you're going to say, ‘Wow—I can do that too someday.’ There's just in the last few years, I mean, Missy Dandle just opened up an eye clinic and she graduated from Allen. Gail just bought a dental clinic and she's a Lefler City graduate and Tyler and Ben and Richard all graduated from Lefler City. Cody Sits just opened up the well drilling place just up north of town, and I know he went to Lefler City for a time, but he graduated from Bankton. I think if high school kids see that, they'll realize that they can do that too, and they'll think more instead of, ‘Well there has to be a job available for me to come back.’ They'll think, ‘Wow, we can create our own jobs and come back.’ Hopefully, it will just kinda snowball and more and more kids will realize that that's a possibility for them.

David from Riley County posed a similar notion when he said:

By giving them career opportunities, that's where we're going to win the day. Eventually it's going to lead to a renewed community in entrepreneurship...well these are seeds that, like some seeds in the prairie that can live for centuries before they blossom, it's the same thing—life happens to people. At first they thought, dreams, you go out and you pursue your dreams, and pretty soon you realize, “Wait a minute, family and community is pretty darn important. And almost more important than my career at some point. And that's when we want them to know that home is home...”

Asking these youth leaders to formally participate unleashed the power of possibility. While these leaders' social ties within the community always had potential, it was the "ask" that converted those ties into resources for new possibilities. The "ask" was simple, yet complicated, because it involved both a simple invitation to a meeting and a complicated proposition for future plans within the community. This combination held the key to causing these youth and adult leaders to engage together in their communities.

Community assumptions and initial attitudes

The informants' connections (social ties) were not the only conditions that led them to participate in the community. While the social ties were the ones to ask the informants to participate, those ties were not the only driving force behind their desire to engage in their communities. A set of common sentiments also surfaced in the data as a reason these youth and adult leaders participated in the community. These sentiments presented themselves as assumptions within the community, as well as initial attitudes about the community and the people within it. Those common sentiments played a significant role in explaining why these youth and adult leaders came together with a cause to improve the community.

The first community assumption observed was a notion that every community member must get involved if the community is to survive. During a meeting in Lefler County with the youth and adult leaders together, the facilitator broke everyone up into small groups of four or five. Each member of the small group was asked to share a significant event in his/her life that helped to develop his/her leadership talents. One adult leader shared in his small group that he was struggling to think of any event. He

mentioned that he was “just a mechanic” at a local dealership. A female adult leader in this particular small group chimed in to remind him of his work as a 4-H leader among other leadership positions he had in town. She casually noted in the group that everyone has to get involved in order for the community to survive. The gentleman responded by saying that “doing multiple things in the community” is why he moved back. He said that if he lived in a larger city, he would just “have his job and go home and do nothing.” Adrienne, another adult leader in Tyler County, spoke to the idea of involvement from everyone when she mentioned, “But also I think a lot of it too is just growing up in a small town. I mean, everybody, everybody, you know, has to participate and help to make the community grow and to be successful.”

Another assumption (or it could be considered an attitude) that resonated within the data was the value of youth as *equal* contributors to the community. Ellen, an adult facilitator of the community engagement initiative in Tyler County, noted the high value the community had to place on the youth in the beginning: “I think if you look at it from our community standpoint, if we want our community to be here many years down the road, I think it’s so important to engage youth now so we can plant those seeds and ask them to come back after they’ve went away for a few years and raise their family here. And really show them, you know, what the quality of life is here.” Rick from Riley County also noted the value of youth when he said, “It’s good to have them at the table as equals, not as less than adults.” Adrienne, another adult leader in Tyler County, echoed Ellen’s comments when she said:

Well, I think, I’m not sure if this is a strategy, but I think we need to, first of all, value their opinions and ideas. And ask for their opinions and ideas. I think that’s very important. Because they come and sit and might not feel comfortable speaking out. So, I think it’s always

important to ask them point blank, ‘What do you think?’ And I think just letting them know that we do value them, make sure we thank them for coming... I think we want to see our young people succeed. I think our attitudes are different from some of the older generations, because I think we value the youth so much more.

The adult leaders also noted the value of youth in serving as a “bridge” over segmented attitudes among community adults. Elizabeth, an adult leader in Riley County, stated:

Going through [the engagement initiative], one of the things we saw was, we had adults and we had a couple kids, but what we saw was segmenting in our county. And it was interesting to see, because when we say ‘county’, people would infer that it meant the outlying areas of Riley City, and if you said ‘Riley City’, some people thought that exclusively meant all the county. So in talking with people, there were these divisions and barriers that were up I hadn’t really thought about it before. So you could see it in the adult population, and we were trying to get to it before the youth found that out, so that they could bridge over that. When we got to the dialogue, it came out loud and clear with people saying those kinds of things.

Ellen from Tyler County perpetuated this idea when she said, “They really wanted involvement from the schools and wanted to...it’s kind of a disconnection between the community and the schools. And so they thought, you know, it’d really be beneficial to us as a Chamber if we knew what was going on in the schools, and these kids may have some great ideas on what we can do different here.”

The attitude of valuing youth was only half of the picture, however, because both the youth and adult leaders noted the value that *everyone* can make in the community. In other words, the informants came into their engagement experience recognizing that power should not be in the hands of few. When asked about the purpose of community engagement, Iris from Lefler County stated:

I think it’s a way for people to think that there are opportunities to lead in the community. I mean, there’s all sorts of opportunities for people.

You know, you don't have to serve on the county board or in the City government. I mean, I'm a Cub Scout leader. I mean, nothing fancier than that. That's important to the community too. So, you don't have to be an elected official to contribute—everybody contributes to the community to make it work.

Nathan from Riley County echoed Iris's comments when he said, "Well, it probably goes to the whole definition of community. It means, from him [referring to his son] who's one, to the 100-year-old person who lives in our community. It goes lifespan from beginning to end. So, everybody has something to contribute." Rick from Riley County also noted that valuing everyone's contribution is not just nice, but also necessary:

And it [the engagement initiative] came to our attention that this was available, and we had a meeting with community leaders. People expressed it seemed the same sentiments that, you know, we need some new leaders. Some of the old leaders are tired and have been active for a long time. They want to turn it over or maybe they're just dropping out.

The youth leaders also shared this sentiment. When asked about the purpose of engaging youth, Amy from Lefler County stated, "To involve everybody in community growth. To make them better leaders." Nikki from Tyler County noted, "We try to get more community involvement from people, try to make it a better place."

The sentiments among adult and youth community leaders included a vision for a better community and/or a disdain for the present situation within the community.

Adrienne from Tyler County and Nathan from Riley County were some of the adults who commented on this particular sentiment. Adrienne stated, "I think being able to I guess have a vision of better things, being positive, being friendly, being open to new ideas, you know I think we're very fortunate here." Nathan spoke of the influence disdain had on his reason for engaging within the community: "I don't know that there was somebody who mentored or inspired me so much to get involved as it was seeing things that I didn't

like and wanted to change to make a difference in those. If you don't like how things are, you better do something about it. Instead of sitting around in a coffee shop complaining about everything that's happening, try to make something good happen."

Nikki and Henry from Tyler County also commented on the power of this sentiment on youths' reason for involvement. Nikki noted, "We just had a bunch of different ideas for how we want to make the community a better place to live. And, we picked, for the youth task force, we picked two different things to focus on." Henry, like Nathan, mentioned the influence of disdain:

I think kids were just... They always complain about how Tyler City was this really boring place to be, that you couldn't do anything. Basically, all we have is a bowling alley and a movie theatre which has a leaky roof. And so, I think Mrs. Benson thought that if we got the kids more involved, we could change that. If you build a youth center of some sort, if we organized activities to do like during like we just had the [sport] tournament during [a spring festival]. Just make Tyler City more livable for the youth.

The youth and adult leaders also mentioned a few attitudes that had to be overcome by either themselves or other leaders before engaging in the community. Ellen from Tyler County mentioned the negative influence school rivalries have on reasons for engagement:

I think we're starting to do this whole county-wide effort, so I think it's really helping, you know, we have such rivalries between our schools in town. That the rivalries are between the schools, but really if you take the schools out of the picture, all the kids are still the same and trying to work together on the same issues. I think trying getting our kids all working together is going to be interesting. But I know some of the kids in Atwood want to, you know, start working on the different activities that the Tyler City task force does. And work together on those things.

Ellen also discussed that adult leaders have to overcome a fear of change before engaging in the community. She stated, "I think a community needs to grasp change and

not be afraid of it. And I think, with youth involved, youth aren't afraid of change—it's the older people. They don't want anything to change.” Nathan from Riley County echoed Ellen's comment when he said:

...some people are pretty negative about a lot of new things and new businesses. And I think one of my ultimate goals is to change people's thinking that...Just because some people like to stop every project that comes along, I think we should challenge that theory. And I think we can. There's some new exciting things... I think a lot of the people who have been negative, the community is really hungry for new people to step up and say, 'Let's do some positive things' and not come up with all the reasons we shouldn't do stuff. Some people don't like status quo to change much.

Young leaders like Ashley from Riley County also recognized the influence of fear.

Ashley stated:

You have to not be afraid of change, because you might hurt someone's feelings. I think, for the youth, that's the most frustrating thing is when we can't get anything done in the community because people are afraid of who they're going to make mad. I think there are times you need to move on for the betterment of the community.

The attitude that had the *greatest* impact on driving these young and adult leaders to community engagement was their “willingness” attitude. Alana, an adult leader from Riley County, mentioned this “willingness” attitude when she said, “I mean it sure helps I think if you feel a certain sense of responsibility towards things. And some people just don't have it... I just think it takes a willingness to get in there and go. You know, don't be so afraid. Maybe there's this old antiquated idea that you have to be a banker or a lawyer or somebody with prestige to lead and it's just not true at all.” Another adult leader, Iris, from Lefler County spoke of the willingness to step up and participate when she said, “You need to be willing to step up and participate and accept that things are going to change. I think a willing attitude is really the biggest part of it. You can't just

sit back and say, ‘I don’t like the way they did that, so I’m not going to be a part of it.’” A young leader from Lefler County, Amanda, recognized the need to be willing to listen: “I think it’s also important that you have an open mind and you’re receptive to the other people’s ideas, because you’re not the only one working towards a goal.”

The young leaders in Lefler and Tyler County also had something to say regarding the willingness to create change and be changed. Nick from Lefler County stated that a person has to be “wanting to show progress”, and Amy from Lefler County stated that a person has to be “willing to change” in order to engage in the community. Henry from Tyler County mentioned that adult community leaders need an “excitement for change for the better”. Henry went on to say, “I don’t necessarily think this organization [youth task force] is a place for natural born leaders.” Rather, the “common denominator is an excitement for change for the better.”

Connections (social ties) within the community and community assumptions (and initial attitudes) laid the foundation to probe these youth and adult leaders to engage in their community. The connections and community assumptions could only remain static as a foundation, however, until the informants were *asked*. Once the informants were asked to formally participate within their respective communities, the social ties and community assumptions became *resources* the informants could tap to improve their communities.

Action/Interaction Strategies

Action/interaction strategies, as mentioned before, are actions taken with a purpose to manage, handle, or respond to the central phenomenon. The following are the

strategies utilized by the youth and adult leaders to manage formally volunteering together to improve their community.

Purpose, function, task, and work

When the adults and the youth came together within the organizational boundaries of the community engagement initiative, the key action they took together was having, first, a purpose or a function. David, an adult leader from Riley County, noted the importance of having a purpose: "...it's not just a social get together like you see some students meet in a homeroom ...that's a social network. Those really don't work, because they don't have a purpose, they don't have a function. When people come together, they build trust through work together. That's how it happens. So they have to have a task. Well, through their tasks, they learn these skills." In Tyler County, the community engagement initiative is youth-led. Ellen discussed how the students determine the purpose and the function: "The students kind of pick what they want on the agenda. They set their own agenda and what they want to work on for the next month or the next year or whatever. It's all youth led and youth driven. I just kind of sit there in case they need assistance with anything." Kurt and Ashley, youth leaders from Riley County, spoke of the often grueling commitment that comes with working toward a purpose, but also the joy of the reaped reward:

Ashley: That's definitely important, 'cause, you know, you can have all the ideas, but nothing is going to happen unless you go out there and you work. And we've talked like the soccer organization that started here. And it took them a ton of work to get that off the ground. But they did it, and they didn't care what it took. They wanted to play soccer, so they worked hard to get what they wanted.

Kurt: Exactly. My dad was part of that group, started it. And there were nights where he'd be gone every night, because he wanted to see me play soccer. He wanted to see my sister to play soccer. See all these

kids, there's 200 kids who play soccer in Riley County. And so that was a small sacrifice not seeing him a couple nights a week 'cause he was at meetings to now playing on Fridays and Saturdays, playing soccer.

Ashley: It's a nice field.

Kurt: They're building new fields there that are supposed to be really nice—it's all worth it.

Having a purpose and/or a function helped to focus the group and motivate work, but with youth now involved, strategies had to be explored by the adults to ensure that the youth were equals at the table.

Asking youth to contribute views

To respond to the new component of youth working with the adults, one strategy the adults utilized was asking the youth to contribute their views. The adult leaders discussed this strategy in their interviews. Alana, an adult leader in Riley County who facilitates the community engagement initiative stated:

Well, it's given them [the youth] an opportunity to stand up and speak, you know, and lead something...And through the [community engagement initiative] class, I think the kids are being given that opportunity to voice that opinion in a group. They're being given an opportunity.

Ellen, the adult leader who facilitates the engagement initiative in Tyler County, stated:

"I think the encouragement, you know...I think they [the adults] are encouraging youth to become involved and to, you know, speak up and then not punishing them for speaking up. Saying 'thank you' or saying 'I never saw it from your point of view. Great job.' Or things like that." Adrienne, another adult leader from Tyler County, continued the discussion on this strategy when she mentioned:

You know, I think they see what needs to happen. I think they see how they would rather have their community be. You know we hear a lot about, 'There's nothing to do here.' So, we're like, 'What can we do?'

What would you rather see being done around here? What kind of events would you like to see? And I think that gets them thinking how they would want it to be here and how we can change it.

The youth leaders also spoke of this strategy and how it developed their comfort level to raise their voice in front of adults. Nick in Lefler County recognized the importance of working with adults and having an equal voice: “I think that if they’re starting out at our age, then it’s good to put us in a setting like this with older people, because it helps us to feel more grown up. Like, be more involved in the community as adults in the community instead of kids.” Evan, also from Lefler County, echoed Nick’s comments when he said, “And like with our group, we like to be involved with the meetings. We like to attend the meetings. Instead of just hearing the adults say, ‘You need to stay, ‘cause we’re developing.’ It’s nice to have a voice in what’s going on.”

The young leaders did not immediately jump in to raise their voices, however. Becoming comfortable with the idea of having an equal voice with adults took some time, according to the youth leaders. Ashley and Kurt from Riley County noted:

Ashley: The first two or three sessions, we weren’t really talking about what we wanted to change in the community. And I just kind of sat back, because I thought, “Well, these people don’t know me very well. I mean, I’m very involved in what’s going on in my world around me. I make it a point to stay up on current issues and realize what’s going on in the world. But, a lot of kids don’t. I mean, it’s probably fair that adults don’t think that children do anyway. And I just kind of hung back, because I thought, ‘You know, they probably won’t think that I know what I’m talking about, and I just don’t want to say anything.’ Then when we started talking about what we want for the community, I think I did the majority of the talking that day, because there’s really nothing for our youth to do in Riley City, there’s absolutely nothing. We can drive to Crawford, drive to Levington or Silver Springs. But there’s nothing in town. So I really fought hard to get something for youth to do in Riley City...I think they [the adults] probably would have not cared had we talked earlier, but, I mean, it was kind of like my own fear, like I really don’t want to seem like an idiot talking.

Kurt: There were some sessions when Richard and I were just sitting back there, not really sure what was going to go on, a little apprehensive. But the more and more we got involved in it, everyone else asking for our opinion, we got more involved in it, actually started sharing.

Ashley: And the adults that are in it really want to see a fresh perspective, because they've been dealing with the same issues since they started their leadership position in Riley City, so they really want to see the fresh perspectives.

Stephanie from Tyler County mentioned something similar when she said:

I think you have to be able to speak out, which is something I had a lot of trouble with, like, to begin with the meetings and stuff, I didn't want to say much, because I didn't want people to shoot me down. But, as I got more comfortable with the people, I can talk to them now and say how I feel, and a lot of times, they'll take my advice—which is nice to feel like I can actually make a difference and not just out there talking.

Asking youth to contribute their views paved a path for further action by the group. With youth at a comfortable point to express themselves in equal capacity with adults, the groups were able to move into their purpose of improving their respective communities.

Working together to generate, prioritize, understand reality of, and connect to resources in order to enable ideas

The youth and adult leaders now served as each others' colleagues. The teams pursued action by working together to generate ideas for community improvement, prioritize those ideas, understand the reality of those ideas, and connect to resources in order to progress the ideas into fruition. This strategy was discussed by many informants. Nathan, an adult leader from Riley County, stated, "I think it brings people together to share ideas that without those there wouldn't be a forum to do that. 'Cause most people aren't just going to decide to go down and get involved in a town hall meeting or go to a City Council meeting unless there's an issue that really affects them and they have to go,

they feel a need to go.” Trenton and Heather, youth leaders from Riley County, also discussed the aspects of this strategy of working together in their community engagement initiative:

Trenton: Well, near the end, we actually had a set of questions to answer, and we all had our tables, and each table had someone from each generation. And so kind of working with everyone from each generation, all the different perspectives.

Heather: I was just going to say, just the different, from one group to the next, even though they had one person from each generation, the answers were still all different.

Trenton: And it was like neat seeing how everyone did want to work together right away. By that time, there wasn't just like two people coming up with answers while the rest just sort of sat there. Everyone had their own input on everything. And you kind of had to see, even I found a few dissenting opinions within our group. And got heard just because we were like, at that point, willing to hear everyone else's stories. And we wanted to. It came up with a really interesting set of answers.

Adrienne, an adult leader from Tyler County, explained further the process of how working together is actualized between the youth and the adults:

We actually started discussion right away, first or second meeting, just started brainstorming ideas of what we'd like to see, how we could accomplish something via three towns, all together. And then we just came up with a list and said, 'Okay, what do we need the most? How can we reach the most people?' That was just kind of the project we thought would meet the needs of the whole county, you know, of the families who need it the most. It was neat.

Ashley, a youth leader from Riley County, furthered Adrienne's comments in describing the roles given to both youth and adults:

I think, coming up with ideas is something that the whole group does. But, certain responsibilities are set out and, this person does this, and this person does this, and this person does this, and... The high schoolers are playing a key role I think... I don't necessarily have the time to take off of school and go look at buildings. Or have the know-how to look at insurance rates or anything like that. So, that definitely needed to be

given to an adult. But the things that I could do, I definitely wanted to help.

The notion of ‘understanding the reality of ideas’ was observed in both meetings. The youth were forthright in generating a large volume of ideas; however, the adults helped the youth to see the logistical realities involved in progressing many of the proposed ideas. The adults pared the ideas down to one or two that were viable given the restraints of time, resources, and energy available. Understanding the reality of ideas went both ways, however. The youth helped the adults to see which ideas would actually appeal to youth. Stephanie, a youth leader from Tyler County, spoke of this when she said:

Well, a lot of times they are trying to decide things for the youth or things that would work well for the youth and sometimes they just have misconceptions and we sit back there and say, ‘No, that’s not how it is at all.’ Then, they realize there’s something else they can do. Just like with the youth dances and stuff when they see, ‘Okay, yeah, we don’t want to start it at 6:00, because no one’s going to come.’ We kind of can help them in that way, so they’re not making mistakes.

An important component to working together was the ability to connect to resources. In both the observed meetings and from the interviews, the facilitators as well as the adult leaders were active in searching out resources, financial and human. The adult leaders were actively and continually applying for grants and/or fundraising to seek monies from local private investors. The burden of fundraising did not always sit on the adults’ shoulders. Trenton and Heather from Riley County spoke of the work they had to do in order to make their engagement activity fly:

Trenton: We had to go out and find them and we also had to talk with businesses about who was going to cater.

Heather: And donations. We were each supposed to try and get one from each of the five generations.

Trenton: And as far as like donations, basically wherever we lived, we had to go and like, or like talking to people who catered, go and talk to them there.

Financial resources were not the only types sought. Often, the adult as well as the youth leaders sought aid from friends or family to help out with projects. Ellen from Tyler County spoke of the resources provided by outside sources, such as the schools and parents:

The school has been just great. Even though it's a community organization, they know that they can either use school supplies or maybe if they need to use a little bit of school time to work on something, or... Their parents have been really great too in helping with different things. As far as, like, financial resources, they've done some fundraisers, so they have some of their own money if they need to spend any money. They went to the Chamber of Commerce early on to, I can't even remember what one of the first projects they did... So, you know, they're pretty good about knowing what's around them.

Progressing ideas to fruition was handled by both the youth and the adult leaders.

While the roles taken by the youth and the adults to facilitate that progression were different, both subgroups played a vital role in moving ideas to finished products of community improvement. Amanda, a youth leader from Lefler County, spoke of this when she said, "Like today was a good example with passing around the paper to sign up for what we want to do. It wasn't like, 'Oh well, you guys have school, so you guys just do this and we're going to figure out the rest.' So, the way it went about today—they really worked with us really good."

Owning a purpose or a function was the first strategy utilized by the youth and adult leaders to move the group beyond just a social network. Once the group of youth and adult leaders was solidified, the adults utilized a second strategy of asking for the youths' views. This strategy allowed for the 'youth are valuable' attitude to matriculate

and be actualized within the youth. Recognition of their value brought the youth to the table as equals with adults, comfortable in expressing their views openly. The trust that was built along with the freedom of communication paved the way for the youth and the adult leaders to utilize the third strategy of working together to generate, prioritize, and understand the reality of community improvement ideas. In addition, the groups worked together to connect with resources in order to enable those ideas. The strategies utilized by the community engagement group mobilized their social and sentimental resources.

Context

Context is the broad environment in which the community engagement initiatives occur. It can include properties that pertain to the particular phenomenon, the location of events or incidents that pertain to the particular phenomenon, and/or a set of conditions within which action/interaction strategies are taken. In the present study, context was considered the location of events pertaining to the central phenomenon. The community, the physical location as defined by county borders, was the context where the engagement occurred between the youth and the adult leaders. Stated another way, community engagement was by the community, in the community, and for the community.

The unique feature of ‘community’ as context was its influence on the youth. Engaging youth with adult leaders moved these youth outside of their previously comfortable ‘community’—the schools—to a new ‘community’—their hometown and county. Through the engagement experience, these youth were placed in what they called the “real world” and were forced to exercise their leadership with people much older and make decisions that affected much more than just their peers.

Eric, an adult leader in Lefler County, spoke of the context's influences on youth when he said, "Everything that happens within [the engagement initiative] is only a bonus, because they're learning as they go. They're having to hold themselves to a higher standard around the adults that they are with. They just have to be good citizens, and I think that helps." Ashley, a youth leader from Riley County, also spoke to the "real world" feel of engaging in the community with adults:

I think functioning in the real world. Like, because it's not just high schoolers, you really see how, when you do, you know, whether it's to start your own business or whether you're a leader in whatever, it's real life experience. It's not like, 'Okay, you have to have this project done by this date and this is going to teach you about leadership.' It's more hands on, real world learning I think...I think it's good training for the real world...Each section is really focusing on one goal. And it's geared towards working in a community. So I think it's for the purpose of preparing people to be leaders in their community—it's really nice.

The physical location of the 'community' served as the most pertinent context, because it was the nest in which the community engagement group perched. The group was made up of community members, it operated within the community, and its fruits were for the community's reaping. Thus, it was the environment that had the largest impact upon the group and its actions.

Intervening Conditions

Intervening conditions are those mediating factors that influence the action/interaction strategies. These conditions typically determine the success or the failure of the strategies. The mediating factors for the actions taken by these youth and adult leaders were comprised of four factors: (1) organized and facilitated by a "champion", (2) resources, (3) ability to communicate ideas, views, and opinions in front of others, and (4) a supportive environment.

Organized and facilitated by a “champion”

As mentioned previously, when the youth and the adult leaders conducted meetings, they worked together to generate ideas, prioritize those ideas, etc. The energy observed in the room was contagious, spirits appeared high among the members present, and the group was capable of creating a significant amount of positive change. The mediating factor, however, between ideas that came to fruition and ideas that died, was a “champion” who organized and facilitated the group. This champion encouraged persistence from the group. In addition, he/she ensured tasks were delegated and action was facilitated. The champion also had the highest ability to find potential resources in order to enable the ideas.

Eric, an adult leader in Lefler County, spoke of the mediating effect coordinators can have on group projects: “I think it’s because we have a designated coordinator, Beverly. That would be my first answer. Because, I don’t know if all communities have that. I’m pretty sure they all don’t. Especially somebody who is totally dedicated like she is. They may have somebody whose job it is once in a while to do community improvement or whatnot. But, she’s totally dedicated and she’s done a great job. I think that’s why we have what we have.” An adult leader from Tyler County, Adrienne, echoed Eric’s comments when she said: “I know Ellen has such a great way about her, you know, I think anybody would do anything for her. So, I think it’s been great to have her coming in and explaining why we need this, why we need youth on our boards and stuff.”

The youth also recognized the mediating influence coordinators have on the success of action strategies. Ashley and Kurt from Riley County spoke extensively to this point when they said:

Ashley: And I think we have highly effective leaders in our community of Riley City. And I guess Alana Bishop pops into my mind when I think of a leader, but you know, Alana works hard in the community. She wants to give those leadership skills to the next generation and I think it's purpose is being played out in Riley City as more and more people are learning about [the engagement initiative], more and more people want to be involved in it, and we're able to get state grants so that we don't have to pay as much and we can get even more people involved. I think it's nice and it's fulfilling its purpose.

Kurt: We've gone through some leadership changes in Riley City as far as Mayor and other things. And I think change is for the good even outside of government leaders, like Alana, who are stepping up and making things happen. I think she has done a good job with the Chamber of Commerce. Something that Riley City does that a lot of communities don't is Riley City supports the arts, and a lot of that has been Alana Bishop working towards that also.

Throughout the interviews and observed meetings, community leaders discussed projects that succeeded and projects that were not accomplished. The striking difference between successful and failed projects was the presence of an adult coordinator who was persistent, delegated tasks, facilitated action, and connected to resources (or helped direct the group to available resources).

Resources

The second mediating factor was resources—in particular, the level of connection to resources and the amount of resources available. Financial resources were a huge factor in the success or failure of action strategies. Without financial resources, progressing ideas into reality was not simply in question—it just wasn't possible. When the adult and youth leaders were able to connect to and mobilize financial resources,

action strategies taken to improve the community became inevitably possible. An adult leader, Rick, demonstrated the power of connecting to resources when he talked about hiring an economic development director in Riley County: “So, we went to them [other towns in Riley County] and said, ‘Let’s get together here. You guys put some money down, the city will put some money down, the Chamber will put some money down. Let’s get someone hired. Let’s find out what our goals are and retain the businesses that we have’...” Alana, an adult leader from Riley County, spoke of the challenges adult leaders have to address when chasing those funds:

I know that then there was some funding sought from the City to actually go ahead and sign up to participate in HTC and hire them basically. I think there was a certain commission fee we get to pay. So that funding was derived, I think Jeff Klondike went to City Council and got some money from I think the reuse lending program that we have in the City to hire HTC and have them come in and help us. So then we became an HTC community—that’s how they talk about that.

Some adult leaders stepped up to provide those resources themselves. Nathan from Riley County mentioned, “And I think about the things we fund through the foundation. We do fund things that the youth benefit from and see that kind of thing, and hopefully be appreciative that we are taking an interest in their development.”

The youth leaders recognized the work necessary for connecting to and securing those financial resources. Ashley from Riley County noted:

And I think Riley County has a pretty strong history of having pretty inventive leaders and resourceful leaders and I think they want that to continue. Because I know we’ve gotten certain grants as a county because of our leadership programs and because of our leadership. And I think it’s good that they want to pass that on to the next generation and make sure that, when we grow up, are equipped to deal with the things you have to deal with and to become good leaders.

Connecting to a limited pool of resources was often the “800-pound gorilla” in the room when the youth and the adult leaders came together. Both youth and adult leaders recognized the ultimate power financial and human resources had over the actualization of their ideas.

Ability to communicate ideas, views, and opinions in front of others

Unexpectedly, a large percentage of the informants noted the importance of public speaking abilities when discussing success or failure in community engagement. The respondents pointed out that, in order to generate ideas, prioritize ideas, connect to resources, etc. and work together, the members present have to be comfortable speaking their mind in front of others. In fact, when a group member possesses a certain talent for public speaking, he/she has a greater chance of success in persuading the adoption of certain ideas. Nathan, an adult leader from Riley County, quipped about the importance of public speaking:

There is one that is the single most important one. And it doesn't have to do with intelligence, it doesn't have to do with experience. I minored in speech, and I hated it. I took one speech class in high school and then I went to the University and I minored in it. I swear about every speech I ever had to give I about hyperventilated. The first time I testified in front of a Legislative committee, if they could have seen my knees knocking under the table, I think they'd probably laugh. But, you have to be able to communicate. You've got to be able to speak. And that's the most important thing. And developing that skill, you can do almost anything. Because you can't lead if you can't communicate. You've got to give them a reason to follow you or you can't lead anybody. You've got to be able to communicate.

Kurt from Riley County advanced the importance of this skill when he stated, “I think communication is huge, getting your ideas, your views, your point across clearly so there's no miscommunication, no misunderstanding. And clearly presenting your views, your ideas, and what you do want to change.” Nikki from Tyler County also added, “I

think you have to be able to show your passion about issues and get others excited about issues...And I think you have to know how to speak just to get your point across to people.”

Both the youth and the adults agreed that success or failure in working together can often be mediated by the members’ abilities to communicate their views and ideas in front of others. Many of the adults noted the power youth have, especially, when they can publicly advocate their ideas in front of adults. Some of the adult leaders joked that the youth often have the adults “in the palms of their hands” when they can articulately express their views and ideas.

Supportive environment

The final intervening condition was a supportive environment. In the observed meetings of both Lefler County and Tyler County, the supportive environment encouraged discussion from the youth, it encouraged new ideas, and it established comfort between the youth and adult leaders which allowed them to move forward more quickly with collective action.

The adults created a supportive environment for the youth when they validated the youths’ ideas. Whenever a youth brought forward an idea, an adult leader was quick to recognize the value in it publicly. Even if the idea was not realistic, that fact was not discussed until after the youth was praised. Ellen in Tyler County pointed to the importance of validation when she said, “But, I think if the youth have an idea, we can’t just instantly shoot it down and say, ‘No, that’s not going to work.’... We want to see them successful, but we have to sit back and let them work it out themselves.”

By having *multiple young leaders* in the group, the youth helped to create a supportive environment for each other. Whenever a young leader was asked to present in front of another community group or asked to talk with other adult leaders in the community, invariably that youth would turn to a peer and ask him/her to come along. It appeared as though the youth felt more comfortable engaging in collective action when they had their peers there for support. The peers could offer a different level of support than the adult leaders. Reagan from Lefler County spoke to this effect when she said, “Not just like targeting one person, but getting them as a group and then trying to involve them. Because, as youth, it’s kind of really intimidating by yourself if you’re going up against a bunch of adults.”

The supportive environment presented to the youth allowed the groups’ collective action strategies to be successful. The support from both the adults as well as other youth established a comfort level among the members for allowing collective action to be executed more easily. Ideas were generated quicker and in higher volume, ideas were prioritized more quickly, understanding the reality of ideas was not a point of contention, and engaging in action to find resources was an attractive challenge for the youth.

Outcomes

Outcomes are best described as the results that surface due to the employment of the action/interaction strategies. The outcomes in the present study surfaced at both the individual and the community level.

At the individual level, the youth gained ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence as a result of engaging their community. In addition, they garnered an

awareness of their community as well as new attitudes and perceptions concerning their community and the people in it.

At the community level, one outcome the community gained was an ability to capitalize on its potential—particularly, an ability to build on new leadership capacity and an ability to draw from new people’s expertise. A second community-level outcome was the ability to perpetuate connections, new attitudes and new community assumptions. The community engagement experience perpetuated a new culture among the youth and adult leaders which spread to the greater community.

Individual-level outcomes

Ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence

As a result of engaging in the community with adults, the youth gained ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence. The adults spoke of the intentional moves they made in order to provide these potential results in their youth.

Adrienne from Tyler County stated:

And so that was a little bit hard for me at first, because I was just thinking, ‘You know, I should just be running the meetings as the adult.’ But, we went to our training, we went to a couple national trainings with them, and we just learned a lot about youth-adult partnerships. And I think that concept is just awesome. And if we could use that more with our youth groups and more with our different boards and organizations, it would be awesome. Because they pretty much run the meeting. I make sure that they have a lot of ownership, I guess, over the group, because they need to have that or they’re not going to be as involved or care as much.

Adrienne went on to talk about the joy she experienced as an adult leader watching these particular outcomes take shape in the students:

And it’s just awesome, I think, to see people asking them, what do you think? How do you think this will work in the community? How would other teams see this? Would they come? I just think it’s awesome to see

them in those positions to have a little bit of empowerment in their community, a little bit of say so. I think people are really starting to see them as, not just as kids who don't know anything, you know, I think they are really starting to value their opinions and their ideas a little bit more.

The youth *recognized* that they were experiencing ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence from engaging in their community. Heather from Riley County noted, "Yeah, it was good knowing that we were the ones who got that, like not the whole thing together, but like that we had a say in what was going on." Heather went on to say that she realized part of what she gained was, "Doing things you didn't think you could. 'Cause I didn't think I could get up in front of all those people and do, like, anything." Nikki from Tyler County furthered Heather's comments when she said, "I'm definitely learning responsibility. I'm depended a lot on from the task force. I have to make the agendas, and I conduct the meetings. So, my dependability has really increased. And, my speaking skills and my leadership." Nick from Lefler County mentioned that what he gained from his experience was, "Being more confident in yourself. Like learning things about yourself that you didn't know before you started." Henry from Tyler County confirmed this consequence as relevant to the study when he spoke of the changes he saw in the community engagement initiative between his first and second exposure to it. He asserted:

I actually was pleasantly surprised. When I left, when it [the community engagement initiative] was [under a different name], it was a pretty young program, and it was still largely adult-led I would say. Like we would go to meetings, we had community adult leaders come in and talk to us and so on. And when I came back, although we still had adult sponsors, the kids do a large brunt of the work...Like this [sport] tournament we just had over St. Pat's. We definitely had adults make sure the entire thing was going the right direction, but I think the kids organized it, they publicized it a lot...Like, even when I left, I felt somewhat helpless I guess. You look at Tyler City, and I was kind of

thinking, less of ‘what difference can I make here?’ and more of ‘how can I get out of here?’ So, when I came back, I saw that these kids were actually making a difference, and this program which I had left had actually grown up a long ways when I got back. So, I guess I felt somewhat empowered, and, ‘Wow, we’re actually doing something.’ So that got me excited, more so than ever.

The adults noticed this outcome in the youth leaders as well. Ellen from Tyler County declared that the change she saw in the youth leaders was, “I think confidence. I’ve seen, you know, with the [sport] tournament or just the different things kids have organized. The committee that went to the Administration to ask for the class—I think confidence is a big one.”

Community awareness

The second outcome that surfaced at the individual level was community awareness. While both the adult and the youth leaders grew in this awareness, community awareness was actualized to a larger extent in the youth. The youth first gained an awareness of what is going on in their community. Amanda from Lefler County quipped about this awareness when she said, “Like the first part was kind of enlightening, like, ‘Oh, that’s there? They changed it? Wow!’” She went on to note, “I think I feel more grateful now. Like, now that the people who we’ve talked to and seen. And we’ve met the people who have put the economic development into action. You see the time and the effort they have put in to making our community good for us.” Ashley and Kurt from Riley County also discussed the power of being aware in their community:

Ashley: I’m just learning...I’ve learned a lot about Riley County. I’m not originally from Riley County and it’s really, when you look at what the area brings, there’s a lot that other communities don’t have. It’s nice the see that people in Riley County are getting things done, working for certain goals.

Kurt: I learned, I mean, I've lived in Riley County my whole life, and there's stuff I learned I didn't even know. One of them talked about some of the demographics within Riley County—some of the age groups, which ones are bigger, which ones are smaller. And that kind of translates into the trends we see as far as businesses. I've definitely become more aware of entrepreneurship, business type things in the county. I went to the Chamber banquet this last year, the Chamber of Commerce banquet, and just to see all these different businesses represented there, hearing all the speeches, and I'm definitely seeing more of that, paying attention to it more often.

Ashley: Well, I know because I've lived in two different towns before Riley City and I wasn't from Riley County, I really just wasn't that involved in the community. I was like, 'Well, you know, these people are and that's fine, but I don't really know any of them, so I'm not going to go join in.' We had a developmental sociologist come and talk with us, and that was the one about the age groups in Riley City. That really showed me, like, we're a really gifted county—really. We have a lot of opportunities. So, I've seen more and been more aware of how I can get involved in the community, and I've wanted to get involved in the community.

The youth also mentioned that this community awareness led them to realize how they can be active in the community. Reagan from Lefler County noted, "I'm more aware of what's going on in the community. So, it makes me more open to helping out, since I know what's going on. You know, what's available through this group and how you can help out." Heather and Trenton from Riley County commented on the "aha" moment of when they saw how to be active in their community:

Trenton: 'Cause before that it was like, 'Plus there aren't that many community things to be active in.'

Heather: Well so we thought. But once we got into that, we were like, 'There is a lot more that we didn't realize.'

Trenton: It's true. There were a lot of things that we were like, 'Wow.' Before we always assumed there wasn't really anything for us to do.

Heather: Or that it didn't matter, because no one would listen to us anyway, or, you know.

Trenton: Just doing [the engagement initiative] and going to the school board meeting, but also holding our own meetings, I mean, it's nice. And it's just being exposed to the entire idea helps really with, if someone were to ask about [the engagement initiative] again, or something like [it], if someone were to ask me to do it again, I would do it in a heartbeat... It's a nice feeling and basically feeling like you're active in the community feels nice. And it gives you something to look back on. Tell the grandkids about.

Nikki from Tyler County discussed how this engagement experience has opened many doors to finding new passions: "I would just say that it's opened so many doors to all the youth that are involved in it in several different ways. I think it gives people opportunities to learn and to maybe find something they're passionate about that they didn't know before. It's just a great thing." Amanda from Lefler County furthered Nikki's comment when she discussed this awareness' impact on future plans: "After seeing the progress made in our community, like, that's what I want to do no matter where I end up living. You know, trying to find your own way to enhance the place where you're at."

The adults claimed that this is what they hoped to instill in the youth all along.

Alana from Riley County noted:

I hope what it does, it makes them understand what it takes to run a small town. 'Cause that has been one of the things that I think is so important is, that when they're having their meetings, they bring in community people to say, 'Hi I'm so and so, and I've organized the grass roots effort to build the aquatic center. I was a housewife at the time.' Literally, that's the situation we have here. There was a gal at home raising her kids and she said, 'You know, I want a better pool.' And she put that sucker together. You know, not by herself, she had a team. So there's no individual that can't make a difference if they just get up and do it. So I hope that's what they're learning, that's one of the main things. And then they should come back! 'Cause it takes a lot of us...I don't know much we're teaching people to be leaders as much as we're teaching them the importance of being a leader and that it's everybody's game. It's going to take all of us.

The third part to community awareness was an awareness of people in the community and their needs. Rick from Riley County commented on this when he said:

Definitely they [the youth] have a better experience and better grip on the whole, our community. They know more about the community because of this and what the dynamics are, what works and what doesn't and why. Whereas, you know, other than that, they're in high school and they're having that high school experience. If you can get them together to have them part of the conversation about why Community A won't work with Community B, well maybe they've never had that experience before.

Nikki, a youth leader from Tyler County, noted the importance of being aware of *everyone's* needs in the community, not just her peers: "I think I can, with all the different groups I've been involved in, I think, if you want to be a leader, you have to learn about all the people and how they want to be taken care of so to say. And, I think I've just learned to cope with different people easier." When probed for what she meant by "people", she responded, "I would say the community, because I don't just talk to people my age. I talk to younger ones and older ones."

The final part of community awareness was an awareness of economic development opportunities. The youth leaders in Lefler County all spoke to this notion in their interview:

Amy: I actually enjoy learning about economic development and how it really affects us—what we can do in it, what people already have done... Yeah like in our community. It's like a really really strong economically developing community.

Evan: Like, if there was an opportunity to raise a family here, which there are, and make money, that's everyone's dream, I would definitely come back. And I've learned that there are opportunities here.

Nick: I think it showed us what is available, because, before, I didn't know that jobs were available or what they were doing to make more jobs.

Kevin: Like all the economic development. Like, I guess I didn't really know what all went on. Like they're trying to bring new businesses in.

The adult leaders commented on the power of economic development awareness.

Ellen from Tyler County asserted, "I think it's... With the older kids, it has helped change their mind that, 'Yeah, there is something that we can come back to.' It's helping them start thinking now that, 'Okay, I can come back and maybe buy that business or maybe become involved with that.' So, I think it's just planting the seeds right now." The adults also recognized the economic development potential within their own communities. Rick from Riley County noted, "But, in economic development, we have a lot of potential because of our location, but we didn't really have an economic development board for our county and our city. Well, so I can tie directly that, our charitable giving, through our foundation, has led to leadership development which directly led to our Chamber president being the first one to stand up and say, 'Let's get a new board started with economic development.'"

The youth spoke at length about their new heightened awareness of their community as a result of being engaged with adult leaders—in particular, what is going on within their community, how they can get active, the needs of the people in their community, and economic development opportunities. While this individual outcome occurred due to the natural process of being engaged in the community, the adult leaders did hold a certain hope that this result would form.

Perception and attitude change

"It has given me a whole new way of listening. And I think listening is the biggest strength I have come away with and not forming my opinion and sticking with it... And if you're really listening and evolving, I hope your thought process changes too.

Because that's what I saw more than anything else. You can be enlightened, and you can change your opinion, and you can be okay with it." Elizabeth, an adult leader from Riley County, discussed here the most significant individual-level outcome found in the data. From the community engagement experience, the youth and adult leaders each personally walked away with an entirely new set of perceptions and attitudes.

The adults changed their perceptions of youths' future intentions. Working with the youth leaders made them realize that youth really *do* want to return to their home community. Reagan, a youth leader from Lefler County, pointed out that, "I used to think that I never wanted to come back to Lefler City, just like to visit family, but then I decided to go into child psychology, and I've met some of the kids that are here and need special help in schools. I kinda just want to come back and do that here with people I know." Nikki also mentioned her desire to move back to Tyler County when she said, "Well, I guess a while ago, the Tyler City Community Foundation did a survey of the school about what our plans were after college. And I never really thought about moving back to Tyler City before that survey. But, that kind of got me thinking about it. And, I realize that I don't want to live in a big city when I get older. I wanna go to college and bring my education back to make Tyler City a better place, because I really like it and I want my kids to live here." Iris, an adult leader in Lefler County, among other adults picked up on this surprising youth intention through the engagement experience. Iris commented about the responsibility this puts on the adults: "Just getting people [adults] to think in the mindset, 'What can we do to make these kids want to come back and raise their families here?'"

The second attitude that resulted from the youth and adult leaders working together was not a new attitude, per say, but the strengthening of an old one. From the engagement experience, both the youth and adults experienced a renewed sense of pride and community spirit. Amanda from Lefler County talked about the difference between the young leaders involved versus their peers who did not: “Like we don’t have a whole bunch of activities planned for us to do on the weekends. You know, you start to have those boring nights where you sit there and you’re like, ‘Oh, there’s nothing to do.’ We, like, have a sense of community.” Stephanie from Tyler County spoke of how this renewed community spirit influences future plans: “Just to get the youth out there and actually getting involved in the community. I think it helps when you’re a part of something, if you’ve helped out with a lot of stuff in Tyler City, you’re not going to want to just desert it when you go to college. You’ll want to come back and see how things are accelerating.” Kurt from Riley County noted the impact his renewed sense of community has changed what he cares about: “When I was younger before this, I probably had no desire whatsoever to do anything before [the engagement experience] as far as the community. Now it’s changed where I am at the Chamber banquet, I am going to other events that involve the whole community and rather than with just one individual group now than before.”

Nathan, an adult leader from Riley County, noticed the strengthened community pride in the youth leaders and spoke about how it has changed adults’ perceptions as well:

They’ll be back someday...I listen to people my age group who are saying, ‘We hope we can build a community to give our kids a reason to come back.’...So, I think that’s overall what we’re lookin’ to do—develop a community that’s got enough going for it. We’re so global

now. We're in a great place—we've got a small place to raise kids, and we're still close enough to Pawnee and Jefferson, we can be there in an hour, both of them. I think, I really like it.

Alana from Riley County told a compelling story about how one girl's sense of pride in her community changed the adults' attitudes. In fact, this girl created a new sense of pride within the adults:

I think maybe the effect is almost as much for the adults as it is for the young people, because we're starting to look at things a little differently. For instance, our Chamber of Commerce banquet, we really involved the youth a lot. We had Vince Schneider's entrepreneurship class there. Kurt was there from Riley City High School showing his small business. We had Tara Swindle who is a high school senior in the speech program at the high school. She was one of the keynote speakers. Because I had been at Rotary and I had heard her give a little speech about how great Riley City was. And how she didn't know what everybody was talking about that they should move away. This is a great town. And she's probably going to be the Valedictorian of her senior class. And I went up to her afterwards and said, 'You wouldn't want to give that at the Chamber banquet, don't ya?' And she said, 'Sure. That's fine.' So I said, 'Okay, you're on.' People couldn't get over that this young lady stood up there and spoke to 230 people so articulately and about a topic that it seems like we're just all scared to say: 'Yeah—Riley City's a great place to live. Sure why not live in rural America? It's safe; it's a wonderful place to raise your kids. There's just as many opportunities here as we want there to be. And if they're not here, we can get 'em here. You know, we just have to pull together and make that happen.' So, I think maybe in Riley County, we're starting to see that young people have something to say. It's not stupid, it's intelligent, and we should involve them and ask them once in a while. Let's stop planning things for them and start asking them you know. I think [the engagement institute] was awesome for that. The folks that got to participate in that, the adults, they must have been blown away by these kids... And when they stand up and talk, they make great sense.

The engagement experience brought about change in youths' attitudes in terms of their community pride. The change in the youths' attitudes had enormous power over adults' sense of community pride. The renewed sense of pride in the youth renewed that same sense of pride in their elders.

The largest change in attitudes and perceptions came in the form of valuing youth. The adult leaders, from this engagement experience, changed the way they looked at youth and began to value them much more. The youth leaders, from the engagement experience, changed their attitude in that they began to *feel valued*. So, through this engagement experience, the adults valued the youth more and the youth felt that they were valued more.

David, an adult leader from Riley County, spoke of how the value of these youth translates into hope for the community:

Well, we want this community to know the students. As I read the newspaper and watch the news, I swear the world is going to hell in a hand basket. But when I sit with people, and I work with people, I have a lot of hope. So what I'm hoping is that these students going out in the community will empower folks with hope number one. The future generation is really the best we've got. They're smart, they're capable. Yeah, they're goofy, but so are we. And to just try and give some confidence to the community. There is hope. The next one is to give...I think the students are going to contribute in a meaningful way, but I think that's secondary. The big thing is to give them hope. Give them confidence in the youth.

Adrienne from Tyler County discussed the process of how her attitude changed from working with these young leaders:

You know, I kind of had the attitude that, kids are kids, and I never really took the time to get to know them...And I just, I don't know, got to start seeing some of the things that they were doing and things that they could accomplish and were capable of. And it's great for somewhere like [my job], a domestic violence agency, to have this group of kids who are volunteers and come and help and do maybe an awareness forum. So, my attitude has changed completely, because, it's just, I see them in such a different light. See all the good things that they want to do. And have gotten to know a lot of the kids at the high school, gotten to know what their dreams are and [what] their passions are.

Ellen from Tyler County also noted the significant change in adult attitudes, especially when it came to decision making: "I think our adults have had a change in

attitude that, ‘Okay, these parks are for the kids. We need to be bringing these kids to the table and finding out, okay, what is it that we want in these parks? And what will be used? What isn’t used?’ You know, I think just the adults asking youth now is probably huge.”

With this new change in attitude about the value of youth, Alana from Riley County discussed the specific intentions adults had to portray in order to relay the message that youth are valuable:

Well, certainly, so they feel part of the decision making process. I mean, they should leave this town knowing their voice is valuable. And that any voice is valuable. I don’t know, I remember when I left high school in this town, I certainly didn’t think it was going to be any big deal whether I moved back or not. I didn’t think anybody would have cared one way or the other. Nobody asked me for my opinion, you know. I don’t know how much impact it will have, but I can’t imagine it won’t have some, you know, to look a young person in the eye and say, ‘Hey, your opinion’s good. Let’s hear it.’ Boy, we’ve heard some neat stuff from these kids. You know, they say smart things. They are thinking human beings too. And they can have a whole different skew on stuff than we do, ‘cause we’re tainted with all these years of, ‘Oh yeah, we did that. I remember that person said that.’ They don’t have that. They’re a clean slate. They’ve got nothing but creativity and an open door to come up with more ideas.

Iris from Lefler County echoed Alana’s comments about the intentionality of adults to value youth: “I guess I hope that they know that they are valuable to the community.

Because they are no matter what skills they possess.”

As mentioned previously, not only did the adults change their attitudes regarding the value they place on youth, but the youth also changed their attitudes—they began to feel valued by community adults. Adrienne, an adult leader from Tyler County, noted that she witnessed this change in the youth: “I think they see us valuing their opinions first of all—that helps. And giving them the chance to take on a project, or helping out,

or speaking, or working with the radio station to do some media things, those kind of opportunities that they otherwise wouldn't have. Those are probably the two main ones: different opportunities and being valued I think as a youth leader." Heather, a youth leader from Riley County, spoke of the value in youth she felt from adult community members: "It feels good knowin' that actual adults will listen to you and take what you say and listen to what you say." Nikki from Tyler County recognized almost innately that she was valued by the adults: "Well, I'm not really a shy person. I get along with a ton of people, adults in the community. I don't know, I think that they really respect my opinion, because I'm involved in so much. And, so when I had to go to the Principal, it just wasn't a big deal at all." Henry, in his interview, stated that the community is "much more accessible" and "welcoming." To him, the idea of "community" was seen more as an "abstract" before, but meeting people now in the community, it feels "more like a family."

When the adult and youth leaders came together to formally participate within their community, the action strategies they utilized mobilized their resources (connections within the community and initial attitudes/community assumptions) into *capital* that could potentially be converted into development at the individual and community levels. At the individual level, that development came in the form of ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence, community awareness, and attitude and perception change. At the community level, that development came in the form of new abilities—in particular, an ability to capitalize on new leadership potential and an ability to perpetuate connections, new attitudes, and new community assumptions.

Community-level outcomes

The outcomes that resulted from the engagement experience were not only reaped by the individuals involved, but also the greater community. The two community-level consequences that surfaced were the ability to capitalize on new leadership potential and the ability to perpetuate new connections, new attitudes, and new community assumptions as further described below.

Ability to capitalize on potential

Purpose? [It] Is to build our capacity for leadership in small towns. Providing people that might not feel comfortable being a leader or stepping up or don't feel qualified...it provides confidence, it provides a network, and an attitude that working with your neighbors, you don't have to agree on everything—you have more in common than all your differences. And maybe you can work together and find what your differences are wherever...Commonly, at least my perception is, in a small town, you mention changing something, and people say, 'I don't want to go there. That's a big fight.' So nothing happened. So that's what's been useful to me is building capital—building your leadership capital capacity.

Rick, an adult leader from Riley County, made this comment when asked what he felt was the purpose of engaging adult and youth leaders together. The community received a heightened ability to capitalize on potential, first, through the building of leadership potential. As mentioned in the introduction, despite the lack of a formal definition of leadership, scholars can agree that the common denominator among definitions is *influence*. Thus, from these engagement initiatives, the community built a new pool of people who have a heightened capacity to influence others. Rick and Nathan from Riley County commented on the benefits the community reaps from this heightened capacity in youth. Rick asserted:

So, the kids, you know, I think we're all lucky—there's some real talent there, some community spirit...I think it increases our chance that these

kids will lead with the idea...They've seen at least the adults that were in their group and including, this year we had some of school counselors. So they see these other people, and they're almost like their peers...They become more part of the, a stakeholder, or someone who can talk about issues that need to be talked about. They have a little different perspective. And I think the community benefits from that.

Nathan stated cleverly about youth, "I think they're [the youth] probably the single largest untapped resource we have. So, I think if we can figure out what to do with them, we could do just tons more."

David, an adult leader from Riley County, spoke to this heightened capacity in youth when he described Riley County youth in action with a local school board:

They've [the youth] met in this very room and presented to the board. And I've been meeting with the board, and I've seen the board in action for probably eight years. I have never seen the board so interested and so engaged in these young leaders. They had them right there, eating out of the palm of their hand. And, in fact, I believe it was that meeting that was the lynch pin for the school to go ahead and make the commitment, 'We're going to build this all the way up.'

Stephanie, a youth leader from Tyler County, also demonstrated her heightened leadership ability with a local school board: "Well, I know like with my school, you have to go through so many different channels to get stuff approved. We thought going directly to the School Board would show a lot more maturity. That way, we're actually getting something done and the adults would look up and say, 'Hey, they're actually meeting something rather than just having an adult help us out.'"

Stephanie also discussed this heightened leadership capacity in terms of powerful relationships with adults when she said:

I think they care a lot about the community, which helps. I just can pick out different people who I know care and who I know, like, if we need some help with something, I can call them and they will offer as much assistance as they can. And if they can't help, they'll try and call back

with someone who can help. And I just think it's a lot of caring with what's going on in the community and wanting it to continue to flourish.

Elizabeth, an adult leader in Riley County, spoke about these powerful relationships in her interview as well. She had the following to say regarding the youth: "I'm thinking they're kind of savvy, and they see that, and they know what it is, and they know the potential of those adult partnerships now. Because what they see is, 'If I need to get something done, I know these people now that I can contact.'" Henry, a youth from Tyler County, mentioned in his interview that he's now "more comfortable talking with peers and adults." The engagement initiative "helps businesses feel closer to the community," and "helps schools feel closer to the community." In a nut shell, he stated the youth task force is the "bridging organization."

Another way that youth demonstrated their heightened capacity to influence was through their energy to overcome the fear of barriers and hurt feelings that are often experienced by adults. Nathan, an adult leader from Riley County, spoke to this notion when he said, "But to hear their perspectives and to think about, 'Well, why can't we do that?' And, I'll tell you what, if you want to do a project, you get those young people who don't know what they can't do—it's awesome! Harness that energy and activity and you can get a lot done...And I don't ever want to be the one to pop their bubble and let them realize those barriers. They'll find that soon enough when they try and get something through, you know, county commissioners or something will get 'em."

Ashley, a youth leader from Riley County, noted this energy in youth as well: "A lot of times you get into that position where people are afraid of change, because they don't want to make someone else mad. And I think something that my class is really seeing is that, when you're young, you don't really care who you're making mad. You don't know

what you can't do. So, I think learning leadership skills when you're young is so important to be an effective leader.”

From the engagement initiatives, youth leaders were not the only ones to have a heightened capacity to influence within the community. As mentioned previously, the engagement initiatives provided the community with a new pool of people who have an increased ability to influence others. That new pool consisted not only of youth, but new adult leaders as well. Elizabeth, an adult leader in Riley County, described explicitly the process of how new leaders were capitalized upon due to their expertise:

I was part of a [community engagement] program, and when I was part of that, we wrote down the things that we would be interested in working on in our community. So, one of the things I said I wanted to be involved in was youth. So, anytime a youth project comes up, I get a phone call which is really nice, because often times you're out of the loop if you haven't made those connections and partnerships. So it was a real opportunity to involve youth in the community in government. So, Jim Jefferson, City Administrator, Alana with the Chamber, and I got together and started talking about the dialogue and what we would like to see, what issues we'd like to come up, and be addressed through this... When we said what we wanted to do, the whole room, so there were 17 other participants in [the community engagement initiative], so everyone there jotted that information down. It was like a good networking experience. As you met for nine months, you started learning the expertise of other people. It seemed everyone in that group was already involved in community leadership. But now we have 17 new people to draw from, because these probably weren't the same pool of people we've already been calling. So it's just kinda that whole mix of people. Although Alana is the one who orchestrated that, other people have called and asked me about other youth projects.

Nathan, another adult leader in Riley County, spoke to the importance of drawing upon new leaders when he said, “And the one thing you really got to balance, in a small community especially, is that the same person doesn't have to do everything... For me, the best thing about [the engagement initiative] was I got to meet people that I probably wouldn't have normally met during the course of just my daily life here. And got to

know them better. And a lot of them are young so I think there's a great foundation there." Rick from Riley County echoed Nathan's comments about the importance of networking these new leaders: "So, we are in the third year, and we're already up to 50 people who have taken it. And each of the two years we've had two students in high school, local public high school...But this is more about community leadership and building consensus and working together and it's been valuable in network—building a network of people that never talked to each other before much."

The youth also recognized the importance of drawing upon a new leadership pool as a result of the community engagement experience. Trenton from Riley County noted in his interview the theoretical importance of drawing upon new leaders: "I mean, in general, it's like it's never a bad thing. Just because getting people active in the community helps shape the community better for everybody in it. And so, it's like when you just let a few people run the show, it can easily go off in the wrong direction." With a new pool of youth leaders who are able to more comfortably capitalize on their relationships with adults along with a new pool of adult leaders who are more comfortable stepping into more leadership roles, the community reaped its first benefit in an ability to capitalize on new leadership potential.

Ability to perpetuate connections, new attitudes, and new community assumptions

The second outcome the community experienced as a result of engaging its youth and adult leaders was an ability to perpetuate new connections, new attitudes, and new community assumptions. Inferring from the interviews and observations, the youth and adult leaders established a new kind of community from their engagement experience. The attitudes and perceptions that were changed within the individuals involved seemed

to spread like wildfire around the greater community. Stated another way, these youth and adult leaders reproduced a new community based on what was changed within themselves.

Nikki, a youth leader from Tyler County, spoke about this ability the most in her interview. From the stories Nikki shared, she appeared to have had a significant impact on the culture among her own peers at school. Nikki talked about the change she experienced personally through this engagement experience and how her attitude has influenced others within the community:

I'd say they've changed dramatically. I think at first it started out as I was bored, and I wanted to have something to do. Going to two meetings a month was going to help me out a little with my boredomness. And, now I really feel passionate about, 'We have to convince people to move back. We have to convince people that Tyler City isn't a bad place to live. You have to look at what it has done for you.' And I think, there have been so many people come up to me and said, 'Hey, how can I join the youth task force? How can I join [the teen violence prevention organization]?' I think because I'm passionate about it, it gets other people excited to be a part of it. And, if nobody tries to make Tyler City better now, it's going to take a downhill slide, and it won't be here in the future...And I just love living in Tyler City, and I just want other people to love Tyler City as much as I do.

Nikki then moved on to discuss how this experience has bred a new kind of community around her. She discussed specifically how she felt the group impacted the community sentiment:

I love HTC. Out of all the things I'm involved in, this one's my passion. Just to make, you know, get a say in what our community does. At first, we started out pretty small and nobody knew who we are, but I think everyone in the community is pretty familiar with HTC. I think the youth task force is the best pillar of it... Oh, wow, I think we've impacted the community in so many different ways. By cleaning up Tyler City, we've made it more attractive to tourists or newcomers or whatever it may be. I think we've totally turned around the stereotype of Tyler City. Because, before, I mean when I was a freshman, everybody [said], 'Oh, I can't wait to get out of this place.' And now, I

would have to say probably 60% of my friends are planning to move back to Tyler City after they graduate. And that's not how it has been in the past. I think we're making Tyler City more appealing to adults also for their children to live in, because before the youth task force, there was really nothing for teenagers to do as far as community involvement. And now that everybody knows about it, it's like, 'Oh, well my kid's in high school, I really want him to be a part of that.'

When asked if she felt the group had a purpose in impacting the community,

Nikki responded:

Yes. I think it's most important to promote our community as a good place. And by promoting it, I think we impact it by attracting more people. I think it's given so many opportunities to people that's just crazy to count. Like, I never even thought about entrepreneurship or small business or anything like that until this task force. I think we're really getting the idea into people's heads: 'You can move back here. It's a good choice.'

Stephanie from Tyler County echoed some of Nikki's comments. She also experienced a change in sentiment among her peers based on her experience engaged in the community:

"And I like that sometimes people think, 'Oh yeah, you're from [that group], so you're one of those geeks or whatever.' Somebody's made fun of us about that before. But then, the next year, a big group of that person's friends joined and now she wants to join, so it's just kind of like, I like watching the change in people's like, 'Okay, maybe it's not that bad.'"

The youth and adult leaders were able to perpetuate new connections, new attitudes, and new community assumptions due largely to the recognition they have received from the community. Evan, a youth leader from Lefler County mentioned in his interview that, "People have been talking about [the engagement initiative] now I've noticed." Kurt from Riley County talked about the attention he received from greater community members:

I have become certainly more recognized within the community. I'd say there are people who see me in street and say, 'Hey, I saw this article in the paper about you with some of the stuff you're doing. That's great.' I've gotten cards in the mail saying 'Congratulations on your hard work.' They're actually really impressed with some of the things I've done. And that's certainly reaffirming what you're doing is actually getting people's attention—that's good.

The local newspapers and radio stations made a concerted effort in all three communities to recognize the efforts of these youth and adult leaders. The day that data was collected from Riley County, for example, the local newspaper had front page coverage of the group's meeting that month. Iris from Lefler County noted this effort by local media when she said, "I know that the [local newspaper] and the radio are both good about letting people know that's going on. And maybe letting the adults know that the kids are excited about learning what they could do, that helps get the wheels turning in the adult minds as well as the kids' minds. Gradually everybody is going to start thinking more positively about the youth coming back or staying here."

By engaging local youth and adult leaders in the community, the individuals involved were not the only ones to benefit. The community developed both an ability to capitalize on its new leadership potential as well also an ability to sustain a new community sentiment.

Summary of Results

The connections (social ties) and initial attitudes (community assumptions) became resources available to the informants once they [the informants] were asked to formally volunteer within their community. The action taken by the informants within the context of their communities mobilized those resources into capital. That action was augmented by the organization and facilitation of a coordinator, resource availability, the

ability of an informant to communicate ideas, and a supportive environment. The capital produced from the action strategies was converted to both individual development and community development. The informants as individuals (especially the youth) developed a sense of ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence. Coupled with a heightened awareness of their community, the informants' attitudes and perceptions changed regarding the value of youth and the innate value of their respective communities. That individual development helped the community develop an ability to capitalize on new leadership potential as well as an ability to perpetuate a new community spirit, filled with new attitudes and assumptions. Table 3 highlights the categories chosen from the data as well as their properties and dimensions.

Table 3

List of Categories with Properties and Dimensions

<u>Categories</u>	<u>Properties</u>	<u>Dimensions</u>
<u>Causal Conditions</u>		
Connections	Connections with people already involved in community	Low-High
	Respect for those connections	Low-High
	Extended involvement in community	Low-High
Initial Attitudes (Community Assumptions)	Level of feelings regarding...	
	Everyone must get involved	Low-High
	Youth are valuable contributors	Low-High
	Youth serve as "bridge" over segmenting attitudes	Low-High
	Everyone can make valuable contribution	Low-High
	Willing attitude	Low-High
	Vision for better community	No-Yes
	Disdain for present situation	No-Yes
	School rivalries	Can't overcome-Can overcome
	Fear of change	Can't overcome-Can overcome
Being Asked		No-Yes
<u>Core Concept</u>		
Community Engagement	Youth formally volunteering with adults in community	No-Yes
<u>Action/Interaction Strategies</u>		
Community Engagement Strategies	Purpose or Function	No-Yes
	Youth asked for views	No-Yes
	Working together to...	
	generate ideas	Low-High
	prioritize ideas	Low-High
	understand reality of	Low-High
	connect to resources in order to	Low-High
	enable ideas	Low-High
<u>Context</u>		
"Real World" of Community	Youth feel "real world" setting	Low-High
<u>Intervening Conditions</u>		
Barriers or Stepping Stones to Success	Organized and facilitated by "champion"	No-Yes
	Resources	None-Much Available
	Ability to communicate views	Low-High
	Supportive environment	Low-High
<u>Outcomes</u>		
Individual-level Outcomes	Ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence	Low-High
	Community awareness	Low-High
	Perception and attitude change	Low-High
Community-level Outcomes	Ability to capitalize on new leadership potential	Low-High
	Ability to perpetuate new connections, new attitudes, and new assumptions	Low-High

Figure 2 illustrates the emerging model that surfaced from the results.

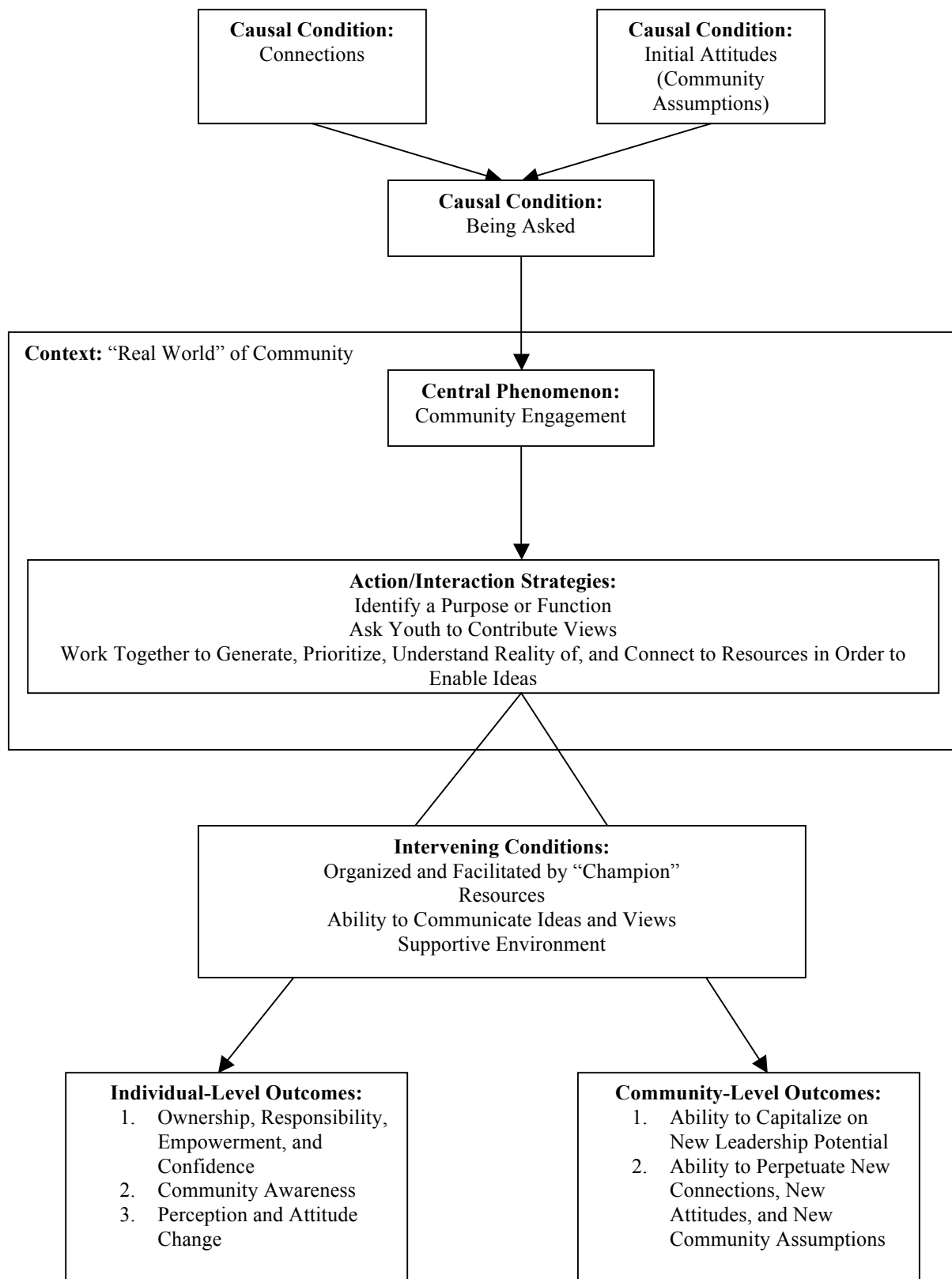


Figure 2. Emerging model

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Interpretation, and Recommendations

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. Most rural communities are declining in population due to an exodus of their young people. A new strategy has emerged to offset this loss of engaging youth in community leadership. The hope is these young leaders will leave for higher education with a vested interest in their community due to this experience and have a desire to come back. This study may lend itself to inform more effective practice as well as to ignite more communities to start youth engagement initiatives.

The following question was central to this grounded theory study: How is youth leadership developed as a result of being engaged in community leadership? The following sub questions guided and directed the study: (1) What are the common strategies used to engage youth in the community in terms of community leadership and service, entrepreneurship education, career development, and adult support?; (2) What leadership skills do youth gain from the engagement experience?; (3) What are the attitudes of youth in regard to civic engagement as a result of being involved in community leadership?; (4) How has the community been effected by engaging their youth?

The setting for the study was three rural Nebraska communities that are involved in the HomeTown Competitiveness program (HTC). These communities, due to their involvement in HTC, employed initiatives to engage their youth leaders. Data collection

consisted of interviews and observations. A total of 23 interviews were conducted, including 14 youth, 3 young adults who returned to their home community, and 6 adult leaders. Youth participants were asked to share about their experience in the community engagement initiative, how they got involved, what they learned, what has changed for them, and how the experience impacted the community (if it did at all). The adult participants were also asked to share about their experience in the community engagement initiative. They were asked for their perspectives regarding what they thought the youth were getting out of the experience and if it prepared them for community leadership as an adult. They were also probed about what changed within themselves as a result of the experience and whether the community changed, as well. Two meetings were also observed where the youth and the adult leaders came together to work on community improvement.

Data analysis consisted of open and axial coding procedures where data were read and coded for any and every incident of phenomenon. Relevant and data-saturated codes were then placed into categories based on their relationship to the central phenomenon of community engagement. Selective coding procedures were employed next to select a story line that best described the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. Findings led to the development of a model which extended the current models by examining youth leadership in the *context* of a rural community where students are engaged with adults in community leadership. In addition, the model extended current models by examining the process of youth leadership through community engagement using both a social capital and sense of community conceptual framework.

Presentation of a Model

Data were analyzed, reanalyzed, and then placed into the components of the 'paradigm model' as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990): causal conditions, central phenomenon, action/interaction strategies, intervening conditions, and outcomes. The model is depicted in Figure 3.

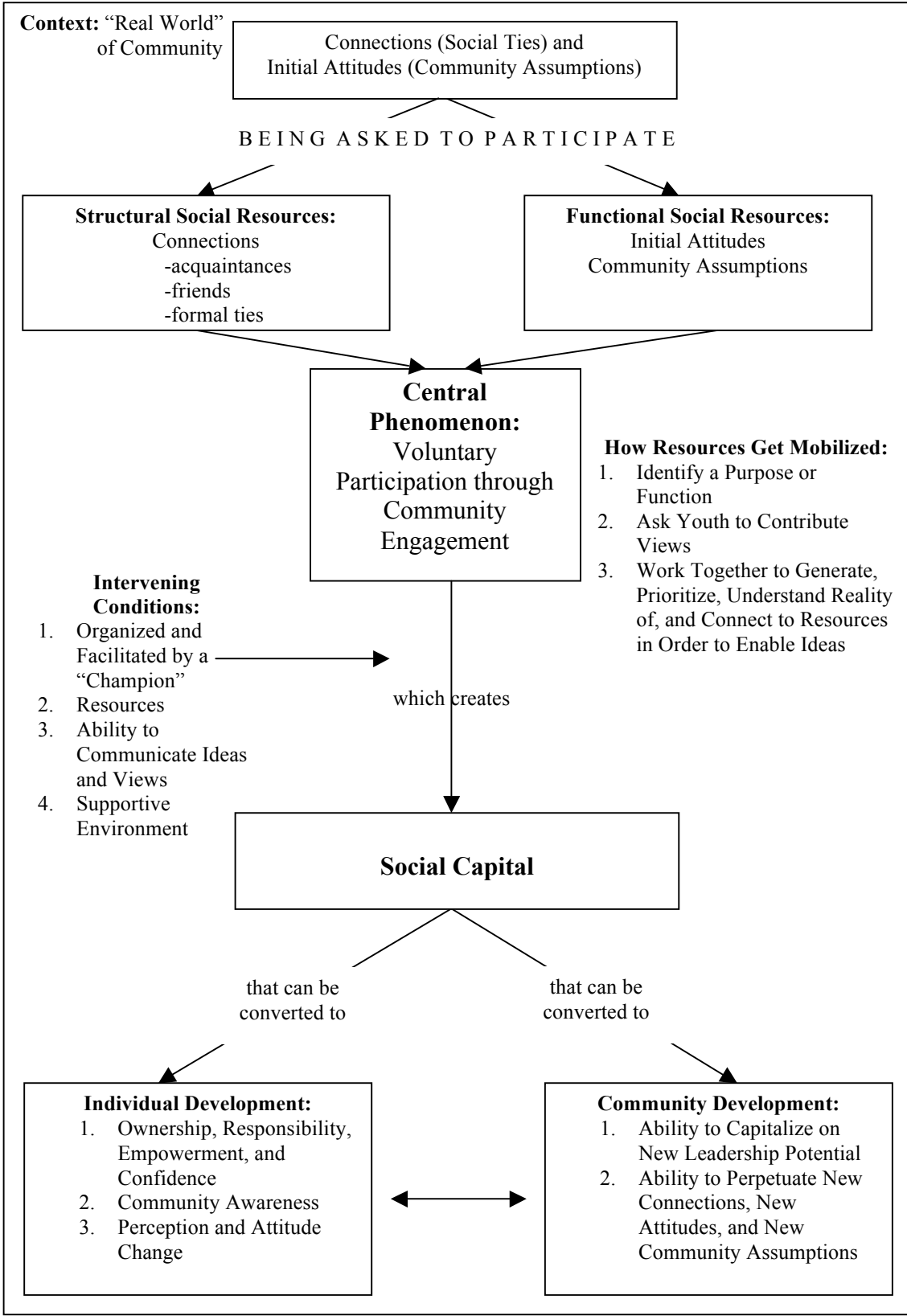


Figure 3. Model of how youth leadership develops through community engagement.

The model illustrates how connections, being asked to participate, and initial attitudes/community assumptions (causal conditions) encouraged these youth and adult leaders to engage in their community (central phenomenon) as a means to formally volunteer their time for the purposes of community improvement. The “real world” community context was the greater environment within which the central phenomenon occurred. The youth and adult leaders had a purpose and/or function and worked together to generate, prioritize, understand the reality of, and connect to resources in order to enable ideas (action/interaction strategies). Those strategies were mediated by the organization and facilitation by a “champion”, resource availability, the ability to communicate ideas and views, and a supportive environment (intervening conditions). The outcomes were both at the individual and community levels. On an individual level, the youth developed ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence. An awareness of their community was yet another individual outcome followed by the most important result—perception and attitude change. At the community level, the outcomes consisted of an ability to capitalize on new leadership potential as well as an ability to perpetuate new connections, new attitudes, and new community assumptions. The individual and community development also had an interdependent impact on each other.

The model further describes how the causal conditions are turned into resources once the youth and adults are asked to engage in the community together. Driven by their purpose and grown by their collaboration, those resources are mobilized to create social capital which is then converted into individual and community development.

Propositions and Discussion

The development of this model led to several propositions regarding the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. The propositions follow the logistical flow of the model. Referring to Figure 3 may aid in following the propositions:

Proposition 1a: Social ties (acquaintances, friends, and ties through formal organizations) become resources available to youth leaders when they are asked to formally volunteer in the community.

Proposition 1b: Community assumptions and initial attitudes become resources available to youth leaders when they are asked to formally volunteer in the community.

These propositions highlight the phenomenon of how social ties and initial attitudes (community assumptions) become *resources* to an individual once that person is asked to formally engage in his/her community. In the present study, most of the informants' acquaintances, friends, and formal ties had been such for many years, yet they were never utilized as a resource to improve the community. When these acquaintances, friends, and formal ties *asked* the informants to formally participate in the community, they [the social ties] became resources that could be tapped by informants in their community improvement endeavors.

Ryan et al. (2005) found that formal ties (connections to people through formal organizations) and weak informal ties (acquaintances) have the largest impact on voluntary participation. This study supports Ryan et al.'s finding considering the impact 'connections' had on encouraging these young leaders to engage in their communities. In fact, Ryan et al. (2005) also found that weak informal ties have the most significant

impact on formal ties, a conclusion also supported by this study. Many of the youths' acquaintances in the community were the ones who encouraged them to participate. Once the youths engaged in their communities, those acquaintances became formal ties, or colleagues, in their work to improve the community.

Ryan et al. (2005) also discovered that sentiment has a statistically significant impact on formal volunteering behavior. This finding is also supported by this study. And, while not quantified, it was observed that connections (or ties) had a larger impact on formal volunteering behavior than initial attitudes (or sentiments).

This study advances Ryan et al.'s findings by demonstrating that social ties and sentiment in and of themselves do not encourage a person to formally volunteer within his/her community. *Being asked* to engage in the community by a social tie is a more likely cause for formal participation. In addition, once the person has been asked, those social ties and sentiments become *social resources* available in community improvement endeavors.

Proposition 2a: Formal volunteering through community engagement is the catalyst for mobilizing social resources.

This proposition highlights the relationship between the resources produced from being asked to participate and the action involved in formal volunteering. As mentioned previously, once the informants were asked to participate, their social ties and initial attitudes became resources for the informants to tap into in their community improvement endeavors. The action/interaction strategies taken by the youth and adult leaders made an impact on those resources. The social ties who asked the informants to participate were often already engaged in the community. Thus, when the informants engaged in the

community, those social ties became either colleagues in their efforts or resources for wisdom in generating, prioritizing, understanding the reality of, and connecting to resources in order to enable ideas. The initial sentiments shared by the informants about their community were often used as a resource to generate and prioritize ideas. The common sentiments helped to open up conversation between the youth and adult leaders. For example, the sentiment that ‘everyone can make a valuable contribution’ (especially youth) helped the informants to feel comfortable sharing their ideas. In particular, the sentiment that ‘youth are valuable contributors’ helped to establish the action/interaction strategy of ‘asking youth to contribute views’. So, the action taken by the informants through their community volunteer work together did have an impact on the social tie and initial attitude resources.

Bassani (2007) spoke to five dimensions of social capital as they pertain to youth. These five dimensions, according to Bassani, have only been discussed in fragmentation in the current social capital literature. One dimension stresses the transformation of resources into capital. Resources and capital must have delineation, because a resource is a *potential* form of capital that has not yet been mobilized (Lin, 2001). Resources must first be mobilized in order for an individual or a community to benefit.

Bassani (2007) makes a distinction between structural and functional social resources. Family structure was used as an example for structural social resources, but in the case of this study, structural social resource could be identified by the structure of social ties, including the level of connection with community members, level of respect for those community members, and level of extended involvement in the community (with children, spouse’s career, local business, etc.). Family social interaction and shared

values were used as examples in Bassani's study for functional social resources. In the present study, functional social resources could be translated into community assumptions and initial attitudes since the informants appeared to share similar sentiments with each other and used those sentiments as resources when working together. Bassani (2007) illustrates that resources are mobilized into capital "when a synthesis of structural and functional social resources occur in a group" (p. 23). This study, thus, supports Bassani's claim that connections (structural social resources) and initial attitudes (functional social resources) have a combined influence on formal participation.

Proposition 2b: Formal voluntary participation through community engagement mobilizes structural and functional social resources into social capital.

The formal voluntary participation engaged in by the youth and adult leaders is what mobilized those social resources into capital. The particular form of the resources available to the informants (structural and functional social resources) were mobilized into *social capital* due to the action strategies employed by the youth and adult leaders. Putnam (1993) defines social capital as the "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 35). Woolcock & Narayan (2000) define it as "the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively" (p. 26). The connections that encouraged participation in the community (networks) coupled with the initial attitudes and community assumptions (norms) provided the appropriate resource base to act collectively as proposed by these scholars. The act of working together to fulfill a purpose (the action/interaction strategies) is what *mobilized* those resources into capital.

This proposition provides empirical support for Bassani's claim that resources must be mobilized in order to become capital. In addition, this proposition advances Putnam and Woolcock and Narayan's definitions of social capital by demonstrating that social capital is not a given entity in itself, but is the product of resource mobilization.

Proposition 3a: The social capital created from voluntary participation can be converted to individual development.

In this study, the data demonstrated that the individual outcomes of formal volunteering within the community are ownership, responsibility, empowerment, and confidence. In addition, the outcomes included an awareness of community as well as new attitudes and perceptions. As proposed in the previous paragraph, formal volunteering in the community is what mobilizes social resources into social capital. Thus, if volunteering through community engagement is what mobilizes social resources into social capital and if volunteering through community engagement is converted to individual development, then it could be inferred that the social capital produced from formal participation can be converted to individual development.

As previously mentioned, the youths' attitudes and perceptions changed as a result of being engaged in the community. McMillan & Chavis (1986) assert that 'membership' and 'influence' are two out of the four components of a person's sense of community, with 'membership' defined as a person's feelings of belongingness and 'influence' as a sense of making a difference to the group. The youth at study felt valued and they felt a new or renewed sense of pride in their community. They felt valued, because they had *membership* in the group, and they were given ownership and responsibility to provide *influence* on their community.

McMillan & Chavis (1986) also identify ‘integration and fulfillment of needs’ and ‘shared emotional connection’ as the other two components of sense of community. The formal volunteering developed these youths’ awareness of their community, in particular, an awareness of community members and their needs. In addition, the attitude and perception change created a new sense of pride—a *shared emotional connection* with the other group members.

Thus, the development of social capital within these youth leaders due to their volunteering experience was converted into a heightened “sense of community”. Pooley, Cohen, & Pike (2005) note that “...the definition of sense of community may inform the level of social capital within the community” (p. 78). This study’s findings argue the converse of the previous statement in that the level of social capital developed from the mobilization of social resources is what informed the level of sense of community.

Proposition 3b: The social capital created from voluntary participation within the community can be converted to community development.

The data from this study showed that the individuals involved were not the only beneficiaries from the community engagement initiatives. The community developed the ability to capitalize on new leadership potential as well as the ability to perpetuate a new culture, consisting of new connections, attitudes, and assumptions. From the engagement experience, these youth clearly impacted the sentiment within their respective communities. These youth not only energized their peers to the idea of moving back, but they also renewed a positive community spirit among residents.

Considering the obvious impact these engagement initiatives had on the communities at study, Putnam’s (1993) and Woolcock & Narayan’s (2000) ‘collective

benefit' definitions of social capital received empirical support. Once again, if volunteering through community engagement is what mobilizes social resources into social capital, and if volunteering through community engagement is converted to community development, then it could be inferred that the social capital produced from formal participation can be converted to community development. The fascinating piece from this study, however, was how the young leaders produced a new culture. Youth were brought into a community leadership "clique"—and not just one or two youth—substantial groups of youth. Having the youth involved generated an entirely new culture. As mentioned in the results chapter, these communities had an existing assumption that, if you want to live in this community, you have to get involved. These youth reproduced that norm among their peers. Due to their community leadership experience, however, they also reproduced a new cultural attitude of, "I love my community; I care about my community; I want to help it change for the better; I want to return one day."

As mentioned in the literature review, Bourdieu spoke of the relationship between social capital and cultural reproduction by arguing that culture has a mediating role in reproducing class societies. Giroux (1983) criticizes Bourdieu's arguments and points out some important flaws. Giroux notes that Bourdieu's analysis pays little tribute to subordinate groups' ability and willingness to reconstruct their own living conditions. Using schooling institutions as an example, Giroux argues that while ideologies might be imposed on students, they will view these ideologies as conflicting with their own interests at times and resist those ideologies.

From the present study, largely the youth leaders involved generated the new culture in each community. The youth and the adults within the greater community who were changed by this new culture had new initial attitudes and assumptions. By changing the culture in the community, the youth restarted the cycle of community engagement. So, when they [the greater community members] were asked to formally participate, they were able to walk into the experience with new attitudes and assumptions.

Significance in the Literature

This study advances the social capital and sense of community literature in four different ways:

First, this study advances Ryan et al.'s (2005) findings by showing that social ties and sentiment do not encourage individuals to formally volunteer within the community in and of themselves—those individuals must be *asked* to participate. When a person is asked to participate, those social ties and sentiments become resources for effective community improvement work.

Second, as proposed previously, the action/interaction strategies executed through formal volunteering mobilize those social resources into social capital. This notion advances Putnam's (1993) and Woolcock & Narayan's (2000) definitions of social capital by utilizing Bassani's postulate that networks and norms must be *mobilized* in order to create social capital.

Third, this study proposes that the level of social capital created from formal volunteering is what informs the level of "sense of community" within individuals involved. This is the converse to Pooley, Cohen, & Pike's (2005) proposition that the level of sense of community informs the level of social capital.

Finally, the ‘collective benefit’ presented in Putnam’s (1993) and Woolcock & Narayan’s (2000) definition of social capital is expounded more thoroughly from the results of this study. The benefit reaped by the collective due to a development of social capital included an ability to capitalize on new leadership potential, as well as an ability to reproduce a new culture, consisting of new connections, attitudes, and assumptions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Limitations and research recommendations

Grounded theory methods encourage the use of purposive sampling in order to provide a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation. While purposive sampling is useful for the goals of this method, the generalizability of the study is greatly reduced. This study’s findings may not apply to other communities. Future research could explore the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement and compare the results to this study.

The model created from this study was produced only from the interview and observational data, but certain pieces to the model could be considered for future studies. The youth clearly impacted the sentiment within the community. A future study could examine how that new sentiment surfaced in future community engagement groups. So, instead of examining the model in linear fashion, a future study could look at the model as being more circular in nature.

Another aspect of the model that could be examined is the impact social capital development (and, in turn, human capital development) has on the communities’ financial capital. In other words, a future study could examine the impact social and human capital development has on economic development.

These youths developed their leadership in the *context* of the community, which was the same context in which these youths had success exerting influence as a result of their experience. This notion begs the question: If a more concerted effort was made to develop youth leadership in the context of community (as opposed to in the context of their schools), would these youths be more prepared to be effective leaders as adults? In other words, does developing youth leadership in the *context* of community better prepare them to use that leadership in the community as an adult? The present study could show initial support for that statement, but examining the process of youth leadership development would benefit from a longitudinal study quantifying the fruits of community-contexted leadership development in youth. This longitudinal focus could quantify the percentage of youth leaders who moved back to their hometown and/or what percentage of youth leaders engaged in community leadership as an adult wherever they reside.

This study demonstrated the benefit of using both a social capital and sense of community framework for studying youth development in the community. Furthering this combined framework might require a quantitative examination of the relationship between social capital and sense of community. The process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement would benefit from a mixed-methods study that explores the impact of community engagement on both social capital and sense of community.

Recommendations for effective practice

Since the generalizability of the study was greatly reduced due to the grounded theory methods, recommending “dos and don’ts” for practice would be ludicrous. What

works logistically for one community may be completely different for another community. Considering the potential positive consequences, however, of engaging youth in community leadership, employing a basic process to engage youth may prove beneficial.

Current community leaders who feel youth are valuable could identify a group of youth within the community whom they think have a willing attitude and striking vision. Then, these community leaders could *ask* that group of youth to participate with adult leaders on community improvement projects. The youth and adult leaders could identify their purpose and work together to generate, prioritize, understand the reality of, and connect to resources in order to enable ideas for community improvement. Based on the results of this study, making a concerted effort to solicit youths' views as well as giving the youth some ownership in the work could prove beneficial. In addition, having a "champion" to facilitate the group's actions and interactions could improve the probability of success in those actions and interactions.

Conclusion

Engaging youth in community leadership developed their ability to influence considering the impact they had in creating a new culture within their communities. While leadership scholars cannot agree on a definition of leadership, agreement exists surrounding the positive, linear relationship between level of influence and leadership capacity. Thus, it is safe to assert that a new emerging theory of youth leadership development occurred as a result of this study: If you *ask* youth to engage in meaningful activity in the community context, there can be an increase in youth's leadership ability to influence significant change.

Returning to the question of whether leaders are born or made, this study cannot provide a conclusive answer. Considering the development in influential ability as a result of the engagement experience, these youths' leadership capabilities were 'made' to a certain extent. Some of these youth did not see themselves as leaders, yet existing leaders within the community asked them to formally volunteer and take some responsibility in improving their community. Would the existing community leaders have asked these particular youths to take on that responsibility if they did not see innate leadership potential? Perhaps a question for future scholars...

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APPENDIX A
Interview Protocols

Interview with Youth

1. Tell me about your experience with the [name engagement initiative here]...How did you get involved with it in the beginning?
 - a. How has your experience been so far?
 - b. What kind of skills are you learning?
 - c. What else are you learning?
 - d. What was your impression of how they engaged you in the community?
 - e. Is this experience just one year, or are you involved with it all through high school?
2. Tell me more about your role in [name engagement initiative here].....
 - a. How did you come to take on this role?
 - b. What do you think is the purpose of doing this?
3. How have your attitudes toward engaging in the community or serving the community changed as a result of being in [name engagement initiative here]? In other words, looking back before your experience, and looking at you now, how do you think your attitudes have changed towards engaging in community leadership?
 - a. How do you see yourself as an adult? 10 years from now, 20 years from now, how do you see yourself?
 - b. What skills do you think are necessary to be part of leadership in the community as an adult?

4. How do you think your experience has impacted the community?
 - a. Do you think the [name engagement initiative here] has a purpose in this?
If yes, why or how?

Interview with Adult Community Leaders

1. Tell me a little about this [name engagement initiative (or activities) here]...
 - a. How are students selected? What criteria and/or characteristics are you looking for?
 - b. What happens during their experience?
 - c. How do the adult leaders involved engage the students in the community?
 - i. What strategies are used for placement into these community boards and projects?
2. What is the purpose of this?
 - a. What leadership skills do you think youth gain from this experience? Do you think their attitudes change?
 - b. What leadership skills do you think are necessary for engaging in community leadership as an adult?
 - c. How does the experience prepare students to effectively engage in community leadership as an adult?
3. In your opinion, how has the community of _____ been affected from having the young leaders engaged through these activities?

Interview with the Young Adults

1. Tell me about your experience in the community now that you have moved in (or back)...

- a. How have you engaged in the community, HTC primarily?
 - b. What or who got you involved in the community?
2. What do you think about the idea of engaging youth in the community?
 - a. What do you think is the purpose in this?
 - i. Skill application? If so, what skills? How do you think they acquire those skills?
 - b. What strategies do you think are necessary to engage youth in order to fulfill its purpose?
3. How have your attitudes toward engaging in community leadership changed now that you are in this community as an adult?
 - a. What skills do you think are necessary to be part of leadership in the community as an adult?
4. How do you think these youth engagement initiatives have changed the community?
 - a. Do you think the [name engagement initiative here] has a purpose in this? If so, what do you think that purpose is?

APPENDIX B

Observation Protocol

1. Where does this social activity occur?
2. Who are involved in the social action?
3. What group activities are people engaged in?
4. What individual activities are people engaged in?
5. What are the objects people use?
6. What is the sequence of activity that take place over time?
7. What things are trying to be accomplished?
8. What emotions are expressed?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Forms



February 16, 2007

HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTIONS
Institutional Review Board

Lindsay Hastings
Dr. Levene Barrett
Nebraska Human Resources Institute
345 MABE
(6237)

IRB # 2007-02-223 EP

TITLE OF PROJECT: **Developing Youth Leadership Through Community Engagement:
A Grounded Theory**

Dear Lindsay:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study. Your proposal seems to be in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

Date of IRB Review: **2/13/07.**

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of First Approval **02/16/07**. This approval is Valid Until **02/15/08**.

1. Enclosed is the IRB approved Consent form for this project. Please use this form when making copies to distribute to your participants. If it is necessary to create a new informed consent form, please send us your original so that we may approve and stamp it before it is distributed to participants.

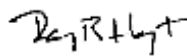
We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

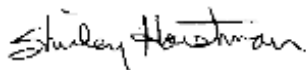
- Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to occur;
- Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change in the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact Shirley Horstman, IRB Administrator, at 472-9417 or email: shorstman1@unl.edu.

Sincerely,


Dan R. Hays, Chair
for the IRB


Shirley Horstman
IRB Administrator

cc: Faculty Advisor



IRB#2007-02-223 EP
Date Approved: 2/16/07
Valid Until: 02/15/08

YOUTH ASSENT FORM

INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP,
EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

**ASSESSING HOW YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPS THROUGH
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

We are inviting you to participate in this study, because you have been actively involved in community leadership activities. We are interested in seeing how young leaders develop as a result of engaging in their communities.

This research will take you about 90 minutes to do. First, I might observe a youth leadership group meeting where you will be in attendance. This portion of the study will require no extra time on your part. No recording equipment will be used at the meeting. Then, you will be interviewed about your experience with this leadership group in a public building within the community. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes and will be audio taped. I will be the only one who listens to the audiotape.

There are no known risks associated with this research. Being in the study will not have direct benefits to you, but it may help researchers and other communities understand how to effectively engage their young leaders like you. In addition, you may learn something about how this experience has changed you and your future plans.

Your responses will be strictly confidential. We may publish the results in an academic journal or we may present at a conference, but your identity will be completely confidential. Any quotation we use from you will have a fake name.

We will also ask your parents for their permission for you to do this study. Please talk this over with them before you decide whether or not to participate.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

If you have any questions at any time, please contact me at 472-3477. Another person you can contact with questions is the advisor for the project, Leverne Barrett, at 472-9791. If you check "yes," it means that you have voluntarily decided to participate and have read everything that is on this form. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Yes, I would like to participate in the study.
 No, I do not want to participate in the study.

Signature of Subject

Lindsay Hastings

Signature of Investigator

Investigator: Lindsay Hastings 472-3477

Date

2/13/07

Date

Advisor: Leverne Barrett 472-9791



IRB#2007-02-223 EP
Date Approved: 2/16/07
Valid Until: 02/15/08

INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP,
EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

INFORMED CONSENT IRB#

Identification of Project:

Developing Youth Leadership Through Community Engagement

Purpose of the Research:

This is a research project that will examine how youth leadership develops through engagement in the community. You have been invited to participate in this research project, because of your involvement in community leadership, particularly HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) "youth pillar" activities.

Procedures:

Participation in this study will require only about 90 minutes of your time. That time will be devoted to a semi-structured interview inquiring about your perspective on engaging youth in community leadership. The interview will take place in a public building within your community and will be recorded with your permission. I might also observe a meeting dealing with HTC youth pillar activities where you will be in attendance. No recording equipment will be used to observe the meeting.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits:

You may find this research helpful in guiding current and future activities that engage young leaders in your community. The information gained from this study will help us to describe the process of how youth leadership develops through community engagement. Our hope is to use this information to help future communities guide their youth engagement efforts in the future.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for three years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences any quotations used will have fake names. The audiotapes will be erased after transcription.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. You may call me (the investigator) at any time, office phone, (402) 472-3477, or after hours (303) 522-8266. Another person you can contact with questions is the advisor for the project, Levee Barrett, at 472-9791. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 472-6965.

Page 1 of 2

IRB#2007-02-223 EP Date Approved: 2/16/07 Valid Until: 02/15/08

Freedom to Withdraw:

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, the University of Nebraska. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

Signature of Participant:

 Signature of Research Participant

 Date

Name and Phone number of Investigator(s)

Lindsay Hastings, Principal Investigator

Office: (402) 472-3477

Leverne Barrett, Ed.D., Secondary Investigator

Office (402) 472-2807

Lindsay Hastings 2/13/07



IRB#2007-02-223 EP
Date Approved: 2/16/07
Valid Until: 02/15/08

INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP,
EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM
IRB # _____

**ASSESSING HOW YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPS THROUGH COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**

You are invited to permit your child to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to allow your child to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Your child is eligible to participate in this study, because he/she has been actively involved in community leadership activities. This parental consent form is necessary for your child's participation, because he/she is under the age of 19. Your child will also be asked if he/she is willing to participate.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how youth leadership develops through community engagement. Specifically, we hope to examine what strategies communities use to engage their young leaders, what skills are gained from the community engagement experience, how attitudes have changed as a result, and how the community is affected.

This study will take approximately 90 minutes of your child's time. The 90 minutes will be devoted to an individual interview. The interview will be conducted in a public building within the community. The interview will be tape recorded, but I will be the only one who will listen to the tape. I will also observe a youth leadership group meeting in which your child might be in attendance. This observation piece to the study should take no extra time out of your child's schedule. No recording equipment will be used for the observation. There are no known risks associated with this research.

Many rural communities have expressed a need for a model by which they can engage their youth effectively. This study will hopefully produce a model to describe the process of how youth leadership talents are developed while engaged in community leadership. The hypothetical model will help to instruct communities in their future youth engagement initiatives.

Any information obtained during this study which could identify your child will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotapes will be kept in a locked file in the investigator's office for three years and then will be erased. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences, but your child's identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Page 1 of 2

IRB#2007-02-223 EP Date Approved: 2/16/07 Valid Until: 02/15/08

Your child's rights as a research subject have been explained to you. If you have any additional questions about the study, please contact me at 472-3477. Another person you can contact with questions is the advisor for the project, Leverne Barrett at 472-9791. If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (UNI IRB), telephone (402) 472-6965.

You are free to decide not to enroll your child in this study or to withdraw your child at any time without adversely affecting their or your relationship with the investigator or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

YOU ARE VOLUNTARILY MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE CERTIFIES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION PRESENTED. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP.

Child's Name

Signature of Parent

Date

IN MY JUDGEMENT THE PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN IS VOLUNTARILY AND KNOWINGLY GIVING INFORMED CONSENT AND POSSESSES THE LEGAL CAPACITY TO GIVE INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.



Signature of Investigator

2/13/07
Date

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR
Lindsay Hastings Office: 472-3477

ADVISOR
Leverne Barrett Office: 472-9791