When Moving Up Implies Moving Out: Rural Adolescent Conflict in the Transition to Adulthood

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What is the influence of community context on the attitudes and plans of rural and nonrural adolescents regarding their future geographic and social mobility? Because of the limited range of careers available in rural areas, rural adolescents may be more likely than their nonrural counterparts to aspire to careers that require their moving away from the people and places to which they are strongly attached. The incompatibility of career aspirations with future residential preferences may result in conflict. To test these hypotheses, I used questionnaire data from 918 8th, 10th, and 12th graders from three midwestern school districts participating in the Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development. Analysis reveals a greater prevalence among rural than among nonrural adolescents of a potential conflict between the perceived importance of staying close to parents and relatives and moving away from their area. Tenth graders expressing this potential conflict are more likely to have lower educational aspirations and to plan to delay college entry. Conflicted rural youth also indicate feeling more empty and angry about their futures. Rural males appear to be most likely to experience the conflict and the negative outcomes associated with it.

Introduction

Are rural adolescents likely to experience a conflict between their desires to "move up" socioeconomically and their wishes not to have to "move out" of their rural communities? Several researchers have suggested this possibility, and some have offered qualitative evidence as support (Donaldson, 1986; Sarigiani, Wilson, Petersen, & Vicary, 1990). The question needs now to be tested against comparison groups of nonrural adolescents. The aim of the present research was to make this comparison and to examine the consequences of such a conflict on the transition to adulthood.

Rural educators have long been concerned about the relatively less ambitious post-secondary educational plans and career aspirations of their students (Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989; Sarigiani et al., 1990; Zimbelman, 1987). I attempt to broaden the scope of this inquiry by placing rural adolescent educational and career aspirations in the context of decisions facing adolescents as they make plans to leave high school and eventually enter the adult labor

force. The focus here is how aspirations for social mobility develop alongside preferences for residential location. Exploring the interaction of these two strands of future plans may, in the end, lead to a greater understanding of adolescent career development in rural settings.

Dimensions of Conflict

Rural economies and labor markets tend to be less diversified than those of urban areas (Reid, 1989). The limited range and number of educational and career opportunities in rural areas is the principal factor thought to make rural adolescents more likely to experience conflicting aspirations than nonrural youth. As Sarigiani et al. (1990) observed among their rural subjects,

> the positive wish to stay in the community with family and friends may also become a negative pressure for those who must leave to attain their goals. (p. 52)

Unlike students in suburbs and cities who likely can go to college and find professional jobs in their metropolitan areas if they so desire, rural students who want to develop their talents must often leave their communities permanently. And many do. The historical trend of youth migration from farms and towns into cities and suburbs continues unabated. Hobbs (1994), using U.S. Census data, documented a net outmigration of 1.5 million young people from nonmetropolitan areas during the 1980s. If those who find they must leave are strongly attached to their families,

friends, and communities, they may also desire to maintain these ties and remain close to home. Because of the narrow range of educational opportunities and professional positions available in a small town, this desire would be in conflict with the aspiration to develop a high level career.

Why Rural Adolescents Would Want to Leave

Upward mobility. Two separate follow-up studies of adult males who had been surveyed many years previously, while attending rural high schools, have demonstrated the relationship between geographic and social mobility for rural adolescents. Chand, Crider, and Willits (1983) confirmed Rieger's (1972) finding that men who had held higher occupational aspirations in high school were more likely as adults to reside in less rural areas. Both studies also showed that migrants achieved more prestigious careers than nonmigrants. One reason for this difference may be because those who migrated tended to have higher levels of the abilities and motivation relevant to career advancement. Nevertheless, Rieger concluded that the effect of this self-selectivity is minor and that migration itself plays an important facilitative role in the career development of former rural residents. Neither of these studies proves the existence of any conflicts in aspirations, but they do suggest that a desire to remain in a rural area would be largely incompatible with ambitious career aspirations.

Expecting to leave, but reluctant. As high school students, virtually the same proportion of future nonmigrants as migrants in Rieger's (1972) study—72%—expected to leave their rural area. Those nonmigrants who had expected to leave were less likely to report being eager about this prospect, while eventual migrants more often indicated enthusiasm. A reluctance to migrate was also evident among the 1972 high school graduates of Mansfield, the rural American hamlet studied by Peshkin (1978). Fewer than 15% were attracted to living in an urban area of over 100,000 people, and more than one third would have preferred to remain in their home town even if given an opportunity to move.

Why Rural Adolescents Would Want to Stay

Ties that bind. One of the milestones of the transition to adulthood is leaving home and family. Adolescents from all communities are likely to struggle with the conflict of simultaneously wanting the independence of leaving and the security of staying close. Beyond the pull of the family, many rural youth also feel the pull of their communities.

Rural community ties are notoriously strong. Hummon (1992) has reported that irrespective of the social and economic characteristics of the community, residents of smaller, more rural, places express greater satisfaction with their communities than residents of more densely populated areas. This result accords with the earlier finding of Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) that lower population density is the second most important factor in determining whether people will express regret at the prospect of leaving their home community. Given that rural families often have long-standing roots in their communities, the most important factor Kasarda and Janowitz found—length of residence—very likely plays a significant role in strengthening rural community attachment.

One factor that binds rural adolescents to their communities is the existence of strong intergenerational networks, which serve to transmit shared values and attitudes. Schneider and Borman (1993), in an ethnographic account of adolescent aspirations in a small town, described how the town's dense relational networks contribute to a feeling of comfort among the high school students. These adolescents appeared to have internalized their community's values, perpetuating the preference for the small town atmosphere.

Leaving, but staying rural. Psychological bonds with a community not only influence preferences for a specific locale of residence. If specific preferences become impossible to realize, those who feel such bonds will likely be drawn toward places of a similar nature. As Feldman (1990) has documented, patterns of ideas, feelings, and values that relate individuals to a particular community become part of their identity and are often generalizable to settlements of the same type. Thus, if adolescents do move out of their rural communities, they are likely, as "small-town people," to prefer a similar type of community. For high-aspiring youth, such a preference would be nearly as likely to lead to a conflict in future desires as would staying in the home town, given the limited range of opportunities in most rural areas.

Studies Suggesting Conflict Exists

Rural youth in Alaska (Ovando, 1984), the Canadian Arctic (Condon, 1988), Maine (Donaldson, 1986), and Iowa (Schonert-Reichl & Elliott, 1995) have told us about "the dilemma of having very strong positive feelings for the community yet also wanting a level of economic security that might force them to leave" (Ovando, 1984, p. 26). Donaldson (1986) interviewed young adults in one rural Maine community, not far from more urbanized areas, about their decisions regarding residence and work. He found that "[f]or most, a central theme was the attempt to reconcile attachments to community and past with a desire—or economic need—to be a part of the modern American mainstream" (Donaldson, 1986, p. 122). Donaldson concluded that for these youth, community context had a significant influence on their life decisions: "Paths leading

outward, and perhaps upward, which might appear normal to more cosmopolitan youth were clearly approached with more ambivalence by many [of the rural] youth" (p. 123).

Possible Consequences of Conflicting Aspirations

Faced with choosing between two goals that seem mutually exclusive, some rural adolescents may lower their educational and career aspirations in order to remain close to their home communities. This possibility was suggested implicitly by Donaldson (1986) and explicitly by Sarigiani et al. (1990). However, Haller and Virkler (1993) have demonstrated that the rural/nonrural discrepancy in educational aspirations is actually quite small. They showed further that about half of the difference can be attributed to differences in socioeconomic status (SES). Thus, the evidence is inconclusive as to whether some rural students choose to lower their goals in order to remain in their communities.

One likely consequence of conflicting aspirations could be a greater than average difficulty formulating definite educational and career plans. Some evidence suggests that rural students who are otherwise highly motivated and able to achieve may experience more ambivalence or indecision about their future plans than comparably able nonrural students. Small town students were more likely than others to answer "don't know" to a question in the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 asking for occupational expectations (Bidwell, Csikszentmihalyi, Hedges, & Schneider, 1992). Out of all small town schools, this answer was given least frequently in schools in which few students are in a college preparatory track. Uncertainty was more prevalent in those rural schools having a moderate to high proportion of their students in college tracks. A number of valid explanations may account for this result, an important one being that ambivalence is a natural consequence of incompatible wishes.

Hypotheses

I propose several hypotheses to assess whether a theory of conflicting aspirations can be applied to a broad range of rural American adolescents. First, rural adolescents are more likely than nonrural youth to have incompatible residential goals reflecting the conflicting aspirations of staying close to home and leaving to pursue educational and career opportunities. Second, those adolescents with conflicting aspirations, regardless of their type of community, are more uncertain and hesitant regarding their educational plans than are other youth of otherwise comparable characteristics. Third, if Hypotheses 1 and 2 are both true, then rural adolescents will experience, on average, more uncertainty about their plans than their urban and suburban counterparts. Adolescents experiencing such indecision

are likely to feel some anxiety about the future (Fuqua & Seaworth, 1987). Thus, a fourth hypothesis is that if students with conflicting aspirations experience more uncertainty, they will have feelings of anxiety about their future goals. Finally, if Hypotheses 1 and 4 are both true, then rural students will be more anxious than nonrural students in this regard.

In the second and fourth hypotheses, the two groups being compared are those with and those without conflicting aspirations. The other hypotheses involve comparisons among rural, suburban, and urban adolescents. Comparing adolescents from these three types of communities may also reveal differences that cannot be explained by a theory of conflicting aspirations.

In any community, adolescent indecision and anxiety about the future would likely reach their peak in the high school years, while students are thinking about several important decisions regarding their transition to adulthood. To discover any possible developmental trends, all of the hypotheses will be tested for age differences. Although no gender patterns can be predicted, the importance of gender to identity demands that tests be conducted along this dimension as well.

Method

Sample

The participants in this study are part of a larger group participating in the Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development, an ongoing 5-year study of adolescents from 12 sites across the United States (Bidwell et al., 1992). Students in public schools were selected to be representative of the different academic tracks, economic backgrounds, and ethnicities of their respective school populations.

The subgroup of 918 students whose data were used in this study includes 254 8th graders, 437 10th graders, and 227 12th graders. They come from three of the Sloan sites: an urban Chicago neighborhood ($n = 206$), a Chicago suburb ($n = 196$), and a small town in northern Illinois ($n = 516$). The sample includes nearly equal numbers of boys and girls. (School characteristics led to the over-sampling of the 10th graders and of those from the small town.)

The three sites were chosen for their location in the same area of the country to control for possible regional differences. Demographically, the three communities vary in important ways (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). The urban area contains a mostly Hispanic population, with Blacks and other Whites making up the remainder. Although the neighborhood is poor, gentrification is beginning there, and it is not plagued by the degree of violence and hopelessness found in other, more impoverished, Chicago neighborhoods. The suburb is composed of a blend of

Table 1
Hypotheses and Measures

Hypothesis 1: *Potential conflict*	Hypothesis:	Rural adolescents are more likely than nonrural adolescents to have incompatible residential goals (#1).
	Measure:	*Living close to parents and relatives* and *Getting away from this area of the country* were 2 of the 13 prompts following the question, *How important is each of the following to you in your life?* Response options were *Not important, Somewhat important,* and *Very important.* The Potential Conflict group includes those who answered *Somewhat* or *Very important* to both questions.
Hypotheses 2 and 3: *Uncertainty and hesitancy in educational plans*	Hypotheses:	Adolescents with conflicting aspirations are more uncertain and hesitant regarding educational plans than are other youth of otherwise comparable characteristics (#2). Rural adolescents will experience more uncertainty about their plans than their urban and suburban counterparts (#3).
	Measures:	Educational aspirations were measured with the question, *As things stand now, how far in school do you think you will get?* Responses were on a nine-point scale ranging from *Less than high school graduation* to *Ph.D., M.D. or other advanced professional degree.* This range was dichotomized into "Less than four years" and "Four years or more."
		Uncertainty was tapped by the response of *Don't know* to the question, *Do you plan to go to college after you graduate from high school?* Hesitancy, by the response *Yes, after staying out of school for one year* or *Yes, after staying out of school for over a year.* Other responses were *No, don't plan to go to college* and *Yes, right after high school.*
Hypotheses 4 and 5: *Anxiety about the future*	Hypotheses:	Students with conflicting aspirations will have greater feelings of anxiety about their future goals than will students with aspirations that do not conflict (#4). Rural students, relative to their nonrural counterparts, will be more anxious about their future goals (#5).
	Measure:	The question, *When thinking about the future, do you feel any of the following?* was followed by the adjectives *Confident, Worried, Empty, Enthusiastic, Doubtful, Lonely, Curious, Angry,* and *Powerful.* Responses were on a scale from 1, *Not at all,* to 7, *Very much.*

upper-middle-class and lower-middle-class families from a broad range of ethnic groups. Bordering Chicago, the community is racially diverse and supports a mixture of urban and suburban lifestyles.

The residents of the small town and the surrounding countryside within its school district are predominantly White and middle class. The town is situated 80 miles outside of Chicago and has a population of 17,000. According to Census definitions, the town is located in a nonmetropolitan county without being itself strictly rural (Hobbs, 1994). Nevertheless, I will keep the term *rural* to distinguish this population from the urban and suburban communities in the sample. The town's economy is not

dominated by agriculture or by any one industry, and it has been relatively stable over the last decade (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980, 1990). Despite its size and proximity to a large city, the site retains a distinctly rural character. (See Schneider & Borman, 1993, for a more detailed description of the attitudes and values of its residents.)

These community differences are reflected in the makeup of the sample. Crosstabulations of student reports of race and ethnicity showed that the proportions of Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites varied across the communities. Similarly, SES differences were evident in the sample. The suburban parents were found to be the most well-educated, followed by the rural and then the urban parents.

The average for each community differed significantly from the other two. Parent education was defined as the higher of the mother's or father's educational attainment (as reported by the student), and it serves here as a proxy for SES.

Measures and Procedures

Hypothesis 1. Participants completed three questionnaires, from which a series of items was selected to test the five hypotheses (see Table 1). Two questionnaire items address the issue of Hypothesis 1, incompatible residential preferences. "Living close to parents and relatives" and "Getting away from this area of the country" are included in a list which follows the question "How important is each of the following in your life?" These two situations are very likely to be mutually incompatible. Thus, the relevant research question is whether more rural than nonrural adolescents believe that *both* living close and getting away are important.

For the purposes of this study, each of these questions addresses, if somewhat imprecisely, one side of the proposed conflict in aspirations. The assumptions here are that the pursuit of educational and career goals is a principal reason why "getting away" would be important and that living close to parents and relatives would require one to remain in the home community. In rare cases, parents or other family members may be planning to move along with a young adult, or the adolescent may be planning to live close to a geographically distant relative. Most adolescents, however, will not be able to realize both "living close" and "getting away" simultaneously. This presents no conflict in future mobility plans for those who feel that one or the other situation is not important. But conflict is quite likely to arise among those adolescents who believe that both living close to parents and getting away are important in their lives.

To assess the prevalence of this potential conflict, all students who answered "somewhat important" or "very important" on both the "living close" and the "getting away" questions were placed in a "potential conflict" category. A "no conflict" category then included all students who answered "not important" to either question. All students not answering both questions were left out of the analysis of this variable.[1] This construction is somewhat crude, combining into one group students with varying degrees of motivations. I use it here as a dichotomous variable, while recognizing that adolescents in the conflict group may vary widely in intensity of any felt conflict. In the analysis, chi-square tests were used to detect whether

the frequency of potential conflict varied by community, gender, or grade. Each of the two questions used in creating the conflict variable was also analyzed in this way. (For all statistical tests, $\alpha = .05$.)

Hypotheses 2 and 3. As Table 1 shows, students indicated their educational plans in their responses to two items. These questions were asked only of 10th and 12th graders. The main issues of Hypotheses 2 and 3—uncertainty and hesitancy in educational plans—are addressed by the question, "Do you plan to go to college after you graduate from high school?" Uncertainty is tapped by the "don't know" response, and hesitancy by the two responses indicating plans of waiting a year or more before entering college. (The two hesitancy responses were combined because the frequency of "after more than a year" was too low to be analyzed separately.)

The other item pertaining to educational plans provides an indication of students' educational expectations. Although this question does not directly address uncertainty or hesitancy in plans, I include it in the analysis because of its close relevance to the issue. No hypothesis is proposed regarding the plans of rural versus nonrural or conflicted versus nonconflicted adolescents; however, given the findings of many previous studies, one might expect the rural youth to have slightly lower educational aspirations (Haller & Virkler, 1993). To simplify the analysis and to avoid the problem of small Ns in some response categories, the responses for this item were combined into two groups: "less than four years" and "four years or more." For both this question and the other item regarding educational plans, differences in frequency of response were tested using chi-square.

Hypotheses 4 and 5. One item on another questionnaire asked students to express how they felt about the future by rating several adjectives (see Table 1). Various aspects of the anxiety about the future proposed in Hypotheses 4 and 5 are represented by the adjectives indicating negative affect (empty, angry, lonely, doubtful, worried). The other adjectives are included in the analysis to provide a standard of comparison and to explore the possibility of group differences in positive affect about the future. Analysis of variance was used to detect differences by conflict status, community, gender, or grade in the average ratings of these nine adjectives.

Potential confounds. To assess whether the demographic differences noted above could account for any differences among the three communities in average responses on the questionnaires, preliminary analyses focusing on race and parent education were performed. Neither of these factors was found to be associated with the potential conflict variable. There is no significant racial difference and no difference in the prevalence of the conflict between those who have a parent with a college degree and those who do not. Thus, the only independent variable

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[1] Although a nontrivial proportion of participants failed to answer both of these questions, the demographic characteristics of this group did not vary across the three communities.

Table 2

Living Close, Getting Away, and Potential Conflict, by Type of Community (Grades 8, 10, and 12)

Variable	Percentage Responding "Somewhat Important" or "Very Important"			
	Rural	Urban	Suburban	χ^2
Living close to parents and relatives	84.2	90.2	77.6	8.0*
Getting away from this area of the country	57.2	43.3	42.0	12.5**
	Percentage Indicating Conflict			
Potential Conflict[a]	49.6	36.4	32.1	15.2***
Males only	56.5	35.5	32.4	14.7***
Females only	43.8	36.9	30.8	4.0

Note. N = 572 8th, 10th, & 12th Graders. Within each community, responses were weighted to achieve equal representation from each grade.
[a]Respondents answering "somewhat important" or "very important" to both questions.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

these factors could be confounded with is type of community. This possibility was tested for each of the dependent measures, and the results will be noted below.

Results

Community Differences in Prevalence of Conflicting Aspirations

Hypothesis 1. The patterns of response to the two questions used in the potential conflict measure vary by

community type, as Table 2 shows. Although large majorities of adolescents from the rural, suburban, and urban areas report that living close is relatively important, only the rural community has a majority of adolescents saying that it is important to get away from their area.

As Table 2 and Figure 1 show, the proportion of students in the conflict category also differs significantly by community type and by grade. Overall, more of the rural adolescents express a potential conflict than do their suburban and urban counterparts, as expected in Hypothesis 1. The potential conflict is most prevalent in the 8th
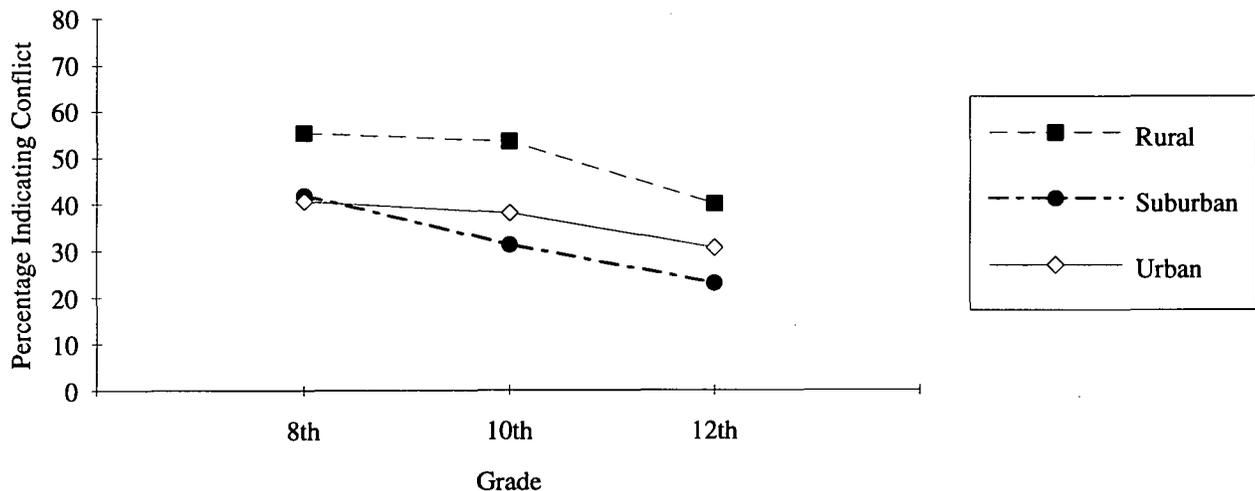

Figure 1. Potential conflict by community and grade (N = 572; Grade 8 χ^2 = 3.5, $p > .05$; Grade 10 χ^2 = 13.3, $p < .05$; Grade 12 χ^2 = 1.4, $p > .05$).

Table 3

Tenth Graders' Educational Plans, by Potential Conflict Status

	% of Conflict Group	% of No-Conflict Group	χ^2
Educational Aspirations			
Complete 4 years of education or more	56.3	79.1	15.2***
Males only	45.8	78.9	13.8***
Females only	65.5	79.3	3.2
College Plans			
College right after high school	57.6	74.5	9.0**
No college	9.3	4.8	2.2
Hesitant	23.7	11.5	7.4**
Uncertain	9.3	9.1	0.0

Note. $N = 283$ 10th Graders.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

and 10th grades: Over 50% of the rural sample in these grades (but less than 42% of the nonrural samples) have conflicting responses. Separate analyses by grade reveal that only in the 10th grade is the difference by community type statistically significant.

Although there is not a significant gender difference in the overall prevalence of the conflict, there is a gender-by-community interaction: Only in the rural community is the proportion of males in the conflict group much larger than the proportion of females. Because of this interaction, no significant community difference in conflict prevalence was found among the females, while the community difference was significant among males (see Table 2).

Future Educational Plans: Less College, and Later

Lower educational expectations. As Table 3 shows for sophomores, many more in the nonconflict group expect to finish four or more years of college than those in the conflict group. At this grade level, the relationship between potential conflict and lower educational expectations appears to be stronger for males than females (see Table 3).

Compared to these sophomores, more of the 12th graders from all three communities indicate higher educational expectations. Seventy-nine percent of the nonconflict group and 72% of the conflict group expect to finish 4 or more years, a difference that is not significant.

Hypothesis 2: plans to delay college entry. Table 3 shows that among 10th graders, the pattern of response to the "college plans" question varies by conflict category.[2]

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[2] Among 12th graders, there was not enough variation from "Yes, right after high school" to make analysis possible.

Potential conflict shows little relationship to the proportion of sophomores indicating uncertainty of future plans. What does appear to be related to potential conflict is the intention to delay going on for further education. Thus, only part of Hypothesis 2 is supported for sophomores.

Examining this issue more closely, one finds that within the conflict group, 29% of those planning to go to college say that they will wait a year or more before doing so. Within the nonconflict group, only 13% of the college bound say that they will wait a year or more ($\chi^2 = 9.01$, $p < .05$). The intention of potentially conflicted students to put off college appears to be more prevalent among males than among females. Of those college-bound males in the conflict group, 44% say that they will wait a year before entering, whereas 18% of the college-bound males in the nonconflict group indicate an intention to delay ($\chi^2 = 8.35$, $p < .01$). College-bound females in the conflict group also tend more than those in the nonconflict group to have plans of waiting—a tendency, however, that is too slight to reach significance.

Hypothesis 3: Is it the community or the conflict? Because rural students make up the largest part of the conflict group, it is possible that the conflict variable is just a proxy for a "rural" variable, and that the differences noted above are due to differences between rural and nonrural students. Comparing responses from the three communities shows that this is partly the case. Both the rural and urban students have less ambitious educational expectations than their suburban counterparts: 54% of the rural and urban students, in contrast to 91% of the suburban students, expected to complete 4 years or more of education ($\chi^2 = 39.3$, $p < .001$). This result may be due as much to SES as to community type. Unsurprisingly, there is in this sample

Table 4

Affect Regarding the Future by Potential Conflict Status, for Grades 8, 10, and 12

Variable	With Conflict		No Conflict		
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	F
Angry	2.82	(1.82)	2.24	(1.52)	10.20**
Empty	2.71	(1.64)	2.28	(1.45)	7.63**
Lonely	2.79	(1.71)	2.60	(1.67)	1.99
Doubtful	3.20	(1.50)	3.19	(1.54)	0.68
Worried	4.07	(1.78)	4.32	(1.81)	1.23
Confident	5.35	(1.38)	5.27	(1.36)	0.00
Powerful	4.93	(1.76)	4.40	(1.88)	6.51*
Curious	5.53	(1.47)	5.67	(1.50)	0.32
Enthusiastic	5.42	(1.49)	5.42	(1.47)	0.01

Note. Each F value is the result of a 2 (Conflict) x 2 (Gender) x 3 (Site) x 3 (Grade) analysis of variance. $N = 544$ 8th, 10th, & 12th Graders. Within each group, responses were weighted to achieve equal representation from each grade.
$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$

a positive relationship between educational expectations and parent education.

Continuing the community comparison, more of the college-bound rural sophomores (32%) plan to delay entering college for a year or more (compared to 21% of urban and 8% of suburban students, $\chi^2 = 19.0, p < .01$). If rural students are more hesitant about their plans, as proposed in Hypothesis 3, they are not more uncertain. Only 6% say they don't know if they would go to college, compared to 28% of the urban students ($\chi^2 = 49.7, p < .001$). This large difference could reflect racial and ethnic

response trends: Hispanics and Blacks indicated uncertainty more than did Whites.

Despite the similarities in the results of the conflict and rural groups, the potential-conflict variable does not lose its usefulness. Within the rural community, students in the conflict group differ in their educational plans from those who do not indicate a potential conflict. A majority (55%) of the rural sophomores in the conflict group say they do not expect to stay in school long enough to earn a bachelor's degree (compared to just 32% of those in the nonconflict group, $\chi^2 = 6.14, p < .05$). Most of the rural students in both groups say they will go on for some
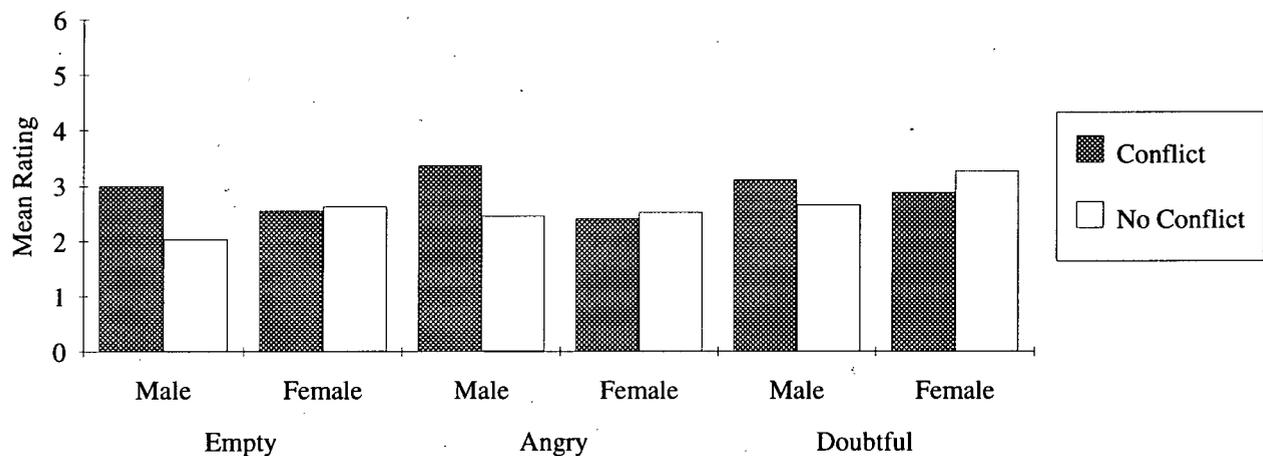

Figure 2. Rural students' affect regarding the future by conflict and grade ($N = 282$; Interactions: Empty, $F(1,268) = 18.5$, $p < .01$; Angry, $F(1,268) = 16.8, p < .05$; Doubtful, $F(1,268) = 11.3, p < .05$).

further education, though 41% of those in the conflict group will wait at least a year after high school before doing so (compared to 24% in the nonconflict group, $\chi^2 = 3.55, p = .06$).

Affect Regarding the Future

Hypothesis 4: more empty, angry, and powerful, but less worried. When asked to indicate how they feel when thinking about their future, 8th, 10th, and 12th graders in the conflict group give higher mean ratings to "empty," "angry," and "powerful" than do students in the nonconflict group (see Table 4). In the only interaction between conflict and gender, males with a potential conflict indicate higher levels of emptiness ($M = 2.83$) than do the nonconflict males ($M = 2.09$) and either group of females (conflict $M = 2.59$, nonconflict $M = 2.43$; $F[1, 505] = 4.85$, $p < .05$). This pattern persisted within the rural community, where, in addition to emptiness, conflicted males also indicate more anger and doubt about the future (see Figure 2).

In a seemingly contradictory finding, only in the rural community do both males and females in the nonconflict group express more worry ($M = 4.53$) than those in the conflict group ($M = 3.86$). In the other two communities, the conflict groups have more worry than do the nonconflict groups, $F(2, 505) = 3.56, p < .05$.

Hypothesis 5: community differences. Significant differences among the three communities occur in the mean ratings of six of the adjectives, and the results appear somewhat mixed. The rural adolescents tend to express more anger and emptiness than do students from the other two communities, but they are lowest among the three sites in regard to being "doubtful." The highest "powerful" and "lonely"—and lowest "curious"—ratings are obtained from the urban sample, while the rural responses tend to fall between the suburban and urban responses to these three adjectives. Overall, these results may reflect racial and socioeconomic differences: Hispanics say they are more doubtful and lonely than Blacks and Whites, whereas students whose parents do not have college degrees indicate feeling more angry and powerful than those whose parents have college degrees.

On two of the adjectives, there are significant grade-by-community interactions. Depicted in Figure 3 are the patterns of response for "curious" and "confidence." In contrast to the urban and suburban ratings of these adjectives, which generally increase with grade level, the rural students demonstrate lower levels of curiosity and confidence in the 10th and 12th grades than in the 8th grade.

Discussion

Like all adolescents nearing the transition to adulthood, rural adolescents must think about their future edu-

cational, career, and residential plans. Their decisions largely reflect a rational consideration of their own abilities and the opportunities available in the local and national labor markets (Gambetta, 1987). What makes this planning process more difficult for many rural adolescents is the perceived and actual necessity of leaving their communities in order to pursue their educational and career goals. As my data show, rural adolescents are more likely to experience the dilemma of believing that both living close to family and getting away from their area are going to be important in their lives.

Given the assumptions that getting away is important for the pursuit of educational and career goals and that living close to family necessarily means living near the home community, this finding supports Hypothesis 1. Rural adolescents, especially males, are more likely to experience conflicting aspirations than are their urban and suburban peers. This difference appeared even though the rural site in this study is close to a major urban center and is rather populous by rural standards.

The consequences of this conflict do not appear to include a greater uncertainty in educational plans, as expected in part of Hypothesis 2. Especially by the 12th grade, the increasingly strong cultural norm of going to college influences the vast majority of adolescents from all types of communities to at least say that they are going. This is no surprise, given the common wisdom expressed by one senior: "You won't get anywhere without a college education." The implications of conflicting aspirations are more evident in the plans of sophomores, especially those who have not yet fully accepted the notion that higher education is a necessity. The sophomores in this study who indicated conflicting aspirations did not say that they were more uncertain about their plans. Rather, they said that they would start college later and stay for a shorter time than their non-conflicted peers.

These results indicate that uncertainty and hesitancy in educational plans are not necessarily associated, as their linkage in Hypotheses 2 and 3 implies. Similar to the pattern of findings relating to Hypothesis 2, the greater rural uncertainty expected in Hypothesis 3 was not found, whereas the greater rural hesitancy was. Compared to urban and suburban sophomores, rural sophomores are not more uncertain about their educational plans, but they are more likely to plan to wait a year or more before continuing their education beyond high school. This result logically follows from the higher prevalence of the conflict among rural sophomores and the positive relationship between conflict and hesitancy.

The conflict is also positively associated with lower educational aspirations, and both occur more often among rural than among nonrural sophomores. However, no causal link can be inferred here; a third factor could be causing both. SES may account for the lower aspirations, but it
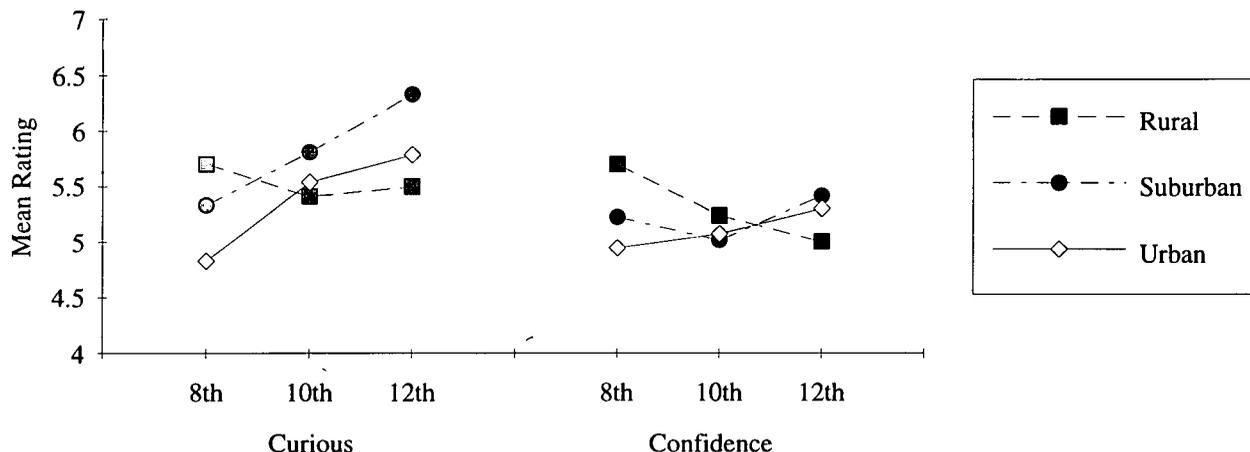
Figure 3. Curious and confidence by community and grade (N = 813; Interactions: Curious, $F(4,797)$ = 5.31, $p < .001$; Confidence, $F(4,797)$ = 3.71, $p < .01$).

does not account for the prevalence of conflict. If the cross-sectional data could be taken to imply developmental trends, it appears that students raise their educational aspirations by the time they reach 12th grade, and by this time the conflict is no longer related to their educational plans. The positive relationship seen in 10th grade may be because sophomores underestimate the amount of education required to obtain their career goals and have not yet seriously loosened their attachments to family and community.

Given two mutually incompatible wishes, whatever decision a conflicted adolescent makes may not be without emotional costs. Compared to other teens, adolescents with conflicting aspirations, especially rural males, say they feel more angry and empty when they think about their futures. Surprisingly, however, the rural nonconflicted youth are more worried about the future than are their conflicted rural peers. Perhaps those with conflicting aspirations will be living at or near home for a longer time, and so feel some security and less worry while still feeling angry about the limited or postponed choices ahead.

Although the rural/nonrural comparison yielded findings on anger and emptiness similar to those from the conflict/nonconflict analysis, Hypotheses 4 and 5 can be said to be only partially supported. The group means of the other adjectives are too mixed to conclude that feelings of anxiety dominate rural or conflicted adolescents' thoughts about the future any more than for other adolescents. Nevertheless, the higher ratings that rural and conflicted students gave to emptiness and anger, coupled with the decline of rural curiosity and confidence with grade level, are powerful indicators of some relationship between rural conflict and negative affect.

That males would be more likely to experience conflicting aspirations, and the negative implications of them, was not predicted. The findings do fit with the experiences

of Murray, Keller, McMorran, and Edwards (1983), who reported that rural males are more satisfied with rural life and are more likely to remain in the community than rural females. Given a more traditional outlook, rural males may also feel more pressure than rural females to prepare for and find an occupation that could support a family. Simultaneously feeling compelled to find a decent living and desiring to remain rural, males may feel angry that there are not more options available for them that would satisfy both of these goals.

Returning to the central question motivating this study, rural teens (at least in one community) are more likely than others to experience a conflict resulting from the perceived need to "move out" in order to "move up." Although there is no reason to believe that the particular small town in this study differs in this regard from all the others across the country, the data can in the end only be said to be representative of the three communities from which they came. Some support for a more wide-ranging conclusion is provided by data from a nationally representative sample. As an extension of this study, I have examined several questionnaire items from the first and second follow-ups of the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988. Within this large sample, rural 12th graders are more likely than urban and suburban seniors to think that both living close and getting away are important (Hektner, 1994).

In order to provide a fuller understanding of the rural community context than the present research can offer, further research is needed that would ask more precise questions about adolescent desires, perceptions, and expectations regarding their future careers and residential locations. One major objective of future research should be to test the developmental and gender trends found here and to develop explanations for them. Another goal must be to examine the ways in which rural educators and

counselors can offer guidance to their students who are struggling with conflicting aspirations. Students should be led to realize that their choices are not always mutually exclusive and that compromises can be made. College educated young adults who live in rural areas can serve as examples and role models.

The perspective of these "post-conflict" rural adults should be explored to gain more insight into the ways that people have found to successfully deal with the conflict of seemingly incompatible aspirations. Current, ongoing research indicates that there are a substantial number of small town adolescents who return to small towns after getting at least some college education. Many of these young adults commute—as much as 80 miles—from their residential communities to larger towns where they have jobs (Hobbs, 1994; Schonert-Reichl, Elliott, & Bills, 1994). The fact that they do not simply move to their communities of employment suggests that living in small communities is important to them. These individuals have found a way to realize both their desire to live in a rural community and their wish for career fulfillment. Their existence shows the importance of both of these aspirations for many rural youth, and it points to one way in which the potential conflict between them can be resolved.

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